

2009

Child's play: Investigating the genre of toy safety recall notices

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Child's play: Investigating the genre of toy safety recall notices

by

Christopher Toth

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

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2009

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the genre of toy safety recall messages. In 2007, also known as the “Year of the Recall,” the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission issued recalls for 80 toys affecting millions of families. Burns, holes in intestines, choking, toxicity—these are just some of the hazards associated with the faulty toys.

To alert consumers about the recalls, toy manufacturers create safety notices that are displayed in retail settings. However, these toy safety recall notices often suffer from poor visual design choices and inadequate expression which impacts their overall effectiveness at communicating risk. Toy safety recall notices are a unique genre because they position themselves within three areas of rhetoric: visual design, negative messages, and risk communication. The larger purpose of this research is to examine toy safety recall notices from these three theoretical perspectives. This research also explores audience perceptions and the complex contexts in which the notices function.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Burns, holes in intestines, choking, toxicity—these are some of the hazards associated with toys that have been recalled. In 2006, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the organization which states on their website that they are “charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from thousands of types of consumer products,” issued recalls for 48 toys. In 2007, the number almost doubled with 81 recalled toys. In 2008, the total was 67 (CPSC, 2009). All of these recalls have affected millions of families, which include our society’s future: children.

To alert consumers about possible dangers of toys, manufacturers issue toy recall notices like the one in Figure 1.1 (Dumar, 2008a). This particular recall notice warns about the dangers associated with Dumar International’s Electric Ride-on Cinderella Car. The notice indicates that the car can short circuit causing burns to children. The CPSC’s website reports that out of the 64,000 Ride-On



Figure 1.1: Example of a toy safety recall notice for a burn and fire hazard

Cinderella Cars manufactured and sold, 40 incidents of overheating have been reported to the organization. On one occasion, a 4-year old child was riding in the car when flames were shooting from under the hood (Dumar, 2008b). Thankfully, no serious injuries have been reported as the result of using this toy.

However, serious injuries are common with recalled toys. In 2007, the year with the latest available data, the CPSC reported 232,900 toy-related injuries from all ages treated in U.S. hospitals. The organization also reported 18 toy-related deaths in 2007, which is actually lower than the 27 toy-related deaths that occurred in 2006 (Chowdhury, 2008). This study specifically focuses on toys¹, which is a distinct category defined by the CPSC. I'm investigating toys because other types of recalls have fewer paper notices than do toys. In addition, toy safety recall notices are unique because the audience of the genre is not the one playing with the risky toy.

As a result of the massive recalls in the past few years, consumer advocate groups are being more proactive. The United States Product Interest Research Group (PIRG) argues that “recalls are a solution of a last resort. Once products are in the consumers’ homes, few will hear about the recall or will be able to take the products out of their homes. The better solution is to ensure that products are safe before they reach our stores and our shelves” (Hitchcock and Mierzewski, 2008, p. 4). While PIRG definitely

¹ Toys are different than children’s products, which include items like cribs, drinking cups, strollers, clothing, etc.

has the right mindset, it will be difficult to eliminate all faulty products. However, the approaches for communicating with the public about recalled products can be greatly enhanced to ensure that more consumers are aware of risks.

Unfortunately, toy safety recall notices often suffer from being poorly designed documents, which may hinder their effectiveness. Although the CPSC issues voluntary guidelines for the design of these notices (CPSC, 2001), the actual toy safety recall notices posted in retail store settings leave much to be desired. Since the design of the notices is left to the manufacturers, the notices' appearances often break many visual rhetoric conventions (e.g., small point sizes, inconsistent typefaces and emphasis, poor placement of pictures).

To compound the design issue, retail stores often place toy safety recall notices in obscure locations, even though the CPSC recommends they be placed “in several conspicuous locations” (CPSC, 1999). For example, some retail stores post them in layaway departments often in the back of stores, behind customer service desks, or in binders that often go unnoticed. Figure 1.2



Figure 1.2: Physical location of safety recalls at one box-chain retail store

shows a picture I took with my camera phone for the location of the artifacts used in my pilot study of recall notices; the notices are in an unmarked binder in an unstaffed area near the back of the store. While many consumers probably heard of the large cases—

Aqua Dots containing the date rape drug or the detachable magnets in Polly Pocket Play Sets—that make the national news, these cases, unfortunately, represent only a small portion of the toys that were recalled in the past few years. Unless actively seeking recall notices on the internet or in the news, consumers are most likely not effectively receiving the message about the dangers associated with several other toys.

Beyond issues of dissemination, toy safety recall notices all suffer from problems with communicating their point clearly and effectively. Within the text of the notices, toy manufacturers deliver negative news and urge consumers to act. They also attempt to retain business and avoid blame for faulty manufacturing. The language on the notices often contains passive constructions and leaves the reader wondering how a dangerous toy could have been manufactured and sold in this country.

By motivating consumers to return, remove, or destroy a toy, the toy safety recall notices function as risk communication artifacts. On the one hand, manufacturers assess the level of risk associated with their toy and make a decision to communicate with consumers. On the other hand, consumers then assess how much of a threat the toy poses to their child before they take action. Traditional risk communication theory in technical communication has usually focused on large-scale disasters—coal mines, nuclear waste sites, etc.; few studies use this lens to examine a specific genre.

Toy safety recall notices are a unique genre because they position themselves in the middle of three rhetorical frameworks: visual rhetoric, negative messages, and risk communication. The purpose of my research is to use these three theoretical perspectives to examine toy safety recall notices and determine their overall

effectiveness. By collecting audience perceptions and deconstructing the complex contexts in which toy safety recall notices function, this study also investigates how the genre can be improved.

This research helps to fill a gap in professional communication research because there have been minimal investigations of toy safety recall notices. While there are some studies that do focus on recalled products, including cars, campers, and kerosene lamps, to my knowledge there is no study that focuses exclusively on toys. Yet the social ramifications of children with elevated levels of lead in their systems or the economic issues associated with medical bills from surgically removing industrial strength magnets are enormous. Finally, this area of research also has implications beyond the walls of academia in the arena of public policy.

Research Questions

My research is guided by a four overarching questions:

- 1) How can toy safety recall notices be more effective given scholarship about visual design (Kimball & Hawkins, 2008; Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998; Schriver, 1997)?
- 2) How can toy safety recall notices be more effective given scholarship about negative messages (Locker, 1999; Schryer, 2000; Limaye, 2001)?

- 3) How can toy safety recall notices be more effective given scholarship about risk communication (Kasperson et al., 2005; Miller 2003; Grabill & Simmons, 1998)?
- 4) What are audience perceptions of toy safety recall notices and how can these views improve the genre's effectiveness?

I should immediately note that this last research question assumes that toy safety recall notices, in their current state, are somehow not effective. In addition, this last question prompts sub-questions that the two surveys implemented in my research design help to answer:

- What do audiences believe are the primary and secondary purposes of toy safety recall notices?
- To what extent do audiences take action on a toy safety recall notices?
- What kinds of actions do audiences take after reading toy safety recall notices?
- What percentage of audiences actually view toy safety recall notices in retail settings?
- Where would be an ideal location for these notices based on survey responses?
- What understanding of visual design, negative messages, and risk communication factors in toy safety recall notices do audiences provide?

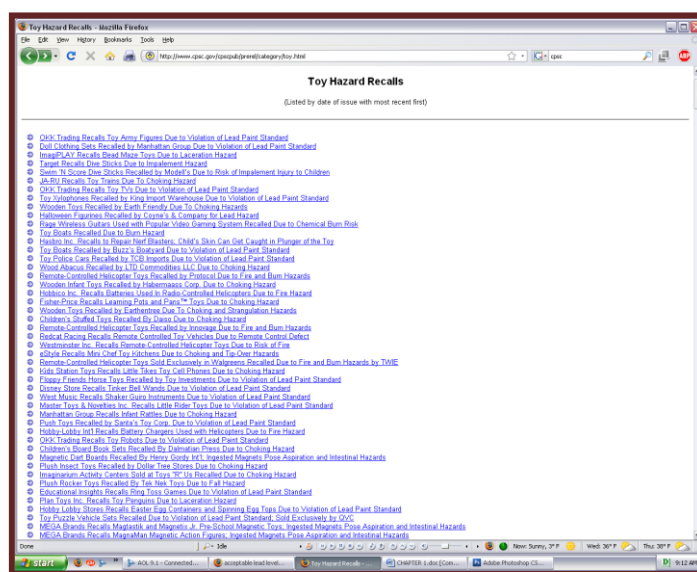
The Beginnings of this Study

I became interested in the rhetoric of toy safety recall notices as the result of a personal experience. Quite haphazardly, I noticed a newsfeed one day while surfing the internet that alerted consumers about Thomas the Train™ wooden train set accessories. Many of the wooden accessories included in the set such as the stop sign, yellow box car, red baggage car, and ice cream factory exceeded the acceptable levels of lead paint. The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines “acceptable levels of lead” as 10 micrograms per deciliter (CDCP, 2005). However, some doctors believe that 10 µg/dL is too lenient and lower levels should be enforced for children (Bernard, 2003; Lanphear, 2005). In fact, scientists from Cornell University discovered that children suffered intellectual impairment at levels lower than 10 µg/dL (Canfield, R. L., et al., 2003). Moreover, lead was banned in household paint in 1978, yet 31 years later in 2009, manufacturers and retailers still produce and sell toys containing lead. What is wrong with this picture?

The Thomas the Train™ toy caught my interest because my 3-year old nephew received it as a holiday gift when I was home visiting him a few weeks earlier. I immediately contacted my sister-in-law, alerting her to the situation and encouraging her to discard some parts of his train set. Luckily, she was already aware of the recall and had taken the appropriate steps with RC2, the toy’s manufacturer.

Since my nephew is important to me, I started to examine the seriousness of the toy recall situation. I visited the CSPC website and was astonished with two

Unlike a burn or choking incident, the ingestion of lead paint usually does not have an



immediate impact that can be documented or easily traced back to the toy, unless ingested in high quantities and/or concentrations.

The second observation which flabbergasted me was the number of toys on the CPSC website that have been recalled. The few isolated incidents I had randomly heard about on the nightly news are, in fact, not isolated at all. The screenshot in Figure 1.3 (CPSC, 2009) shows recent toy recalls in 2008 and 2009. However, notice the scroll bar and how this image represents only a tiny fraction of all the toy recalls. The number of

recalled toys has skyrocketed compared to only a few years ago. Some of the increase can be attributed to globalization and the increasingly complex supply chains of products. Another source may be that as more toys become recalled, consumer advocacy groups and organizations like PIRG are scrutinizing the toy situation more closely.

Nonetheless, after understanding the sheer number of recalled toys and the number of families affected, I almost believed I had no choice but to investigate the genre of toy safety recall notices to comprehend how well the public is being informed.

Pilot Study

My dissertation research is guided by a pilot study that I conducted on toy safety recall notices in the spring of 2008. The research for my pilot study was primarily directed by scholarship in visual rhetoric, as well as a few studies on safety recall messages. However, during the process of interviewing participants, I discovered how difficult it was to examine just the visual design of the notices without considering external factors associated with the notices, as well as the inherent negative message and risk communication elements intermixed with the toy safety recall notices.

I used interviews in the pilot study as the main means of investigation. The participants were all adults and a convenience sample, since they were comprised of instructors from a Midwest University's Department of English. All participants had

children who were 10 years old or younger. In addition, all of these participants were academics. While this distinguishing characteristic provided some insights into safety recall notices, I wondered if the “typical” middle-class parent from non-academic settings would have similar observations about toy safety recall notices.

During the pilot study, I showed the participants three different examples of toy safety recall notices one at a time and asked a series of questions to ascertain their perceptions of the documents. The three samples, shown in Figure 1.4 below, represented a type of purposeful sampling at the artifact level and demonstrated three different kinds of risk—intestinal blockage, fire, and lead paint exposure (Mega, 2008; Dumar, 2008; RC2, 2008). All three hazards have the potential to cause death to the child. These artifacts were taken from two locations in a big-box chain store: on a



Figure 1.4: Three safety signs warning against intestinal blockage, fire, and lead paint hazards

bulletin board at a customer service area and in an unlabeled binder in the back of the store near the restrooms (see Figure 1.2).

Each participant was shown the three toy safety recall notices in the exact same order before being asked a series of questions about each one. Two of the notices were in color while the third was in black and white to see if participants had different reactions to color. In addition, when I originally collected the notices, one of them was in black and white. Moreover, the toy safety recall notices that I showed participants are paper copies of the ones found in retail stores. The reason I chose to use paper documents is that the notices found online often have consistent visual formats suitable for the internet.

After color coding my data, I looked for common themes that surfaced from each of the participants. I understand a theme to be a topic or issue that a majority of my participants mentioned without necessarily direct prompting from my questions. From my coded data, there are four themes that seem to surface: visual design, expression, response to risk, and placement. I will discuss each one of these in a bit more detail:

Visual Design: Some key pieces of information I gained related to visual design were about the typefaces used on safety recall notices and how it made notices more or less clear, the need for clear pictures that showed the hazard, call-outs highlighting the actual danger, scale of pictures, and the use of color.

Expression: Responses also emerged about the language used on toy recall notices. For example, the level of vocabulary used in these notices is often quite high, with words like “aspirated.” Participants often wanted more explanation than a generic “safety notice” across the top. In addition, participants also pointed out the passive construction used on these signs. Finally, there was some confusion over the main title on the signs—“safety recall” versus “safety notice” versus “recall notice.”

Response to Risk: Another theme that emerged from my data were the parents’ response to the risk. Some parents felt they had control over the danger; they believed that they had the power to monitor whether or not the toys would be a risk for their children. In addition, parents felt more inclined to respond to the risk if the toy was expensive and/or if they believed the danger was more severe. Furthermore, if parents had to replace/repair a toy, they wanted an easy fix. Finally, the parents were upset over the lead paint risk, citing laws that prohibit lead in houses paints, yet manufacturers still make toys with lead paint for innocent children. Clearly, my participants’ concerns raise the larger question: why are there not better regulations on toys in this country?

Placement: Given what I knew about the location of the safety notices, I wanted to learn from my participants what they envisioned as the ideal location for the signs. While all suggested the toy aisle, they were also not convinced this would be a great location. However, they couldn’t offer other suitable places.

While I had initially gone into the data gathering process thinking that I would just focus on visual design, the parents' perceptions did not stick to this topic; my participants provided much more information than I could have predicted. As a result, one tentative exploration turned into the beginning of understanding the complex web of toy safety recall notices. The unresolved issues that surfaced helped me develop the list of research questions for my dissertation.

Organization Overview

In this introductory chapter, I have discussed the major issues surrounding toy safety recall notices and outlined my primary and secondary research questions. I also sketched an overview of what is already known about toy safety recall notices and established the scope of my study, which sets the stage for the rest of this dissertation. Finally, this chapter also defined the beginnings of this study and outlined some results from my pilot study.

I now briefly outline the remaining chapters of this dissertation:

Chapter 2 provides a fully developed theoretical grounding for the study by presenting a thorough review of professional communication literature on visual design, negative messages, and risk communication, and how this scholarship relates to toy safety recall notices.

Chapter 3 presents a rhetorical analysis of toy safety recall notices. This analysis examines the audiences, purposes, and complex contexts associated with toy safety recall notices. In addition, I analyze visual and verbal strategies of the notices.

Chapter 4 describes a rationale for my survey methodology. It also outlines my methods for the sample, data collection techniques, and data management.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the survey and the people who participated. It also presents the results and provides a discussion for Part I and Part II of the survey.

Chapter 6 outlines conclusions about toy safety recall notices from the survey and the rhetorical analysis. This chapter also outlines limitations to my study and suggests avenues for further research.

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CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While there are a few studies that focus on product recall messages, none to date focuses exclusively on children's toys. Product recall notices for toys are a unique genre; they differ from other product recall notices in that the audience is not the one ultimately using the product or affected by the risk. The larger purpose of my research is to determine how the effectiveness of toy safety recall messages can be improved given audience perceptions about the notices and principles set forth in professional communication scholarship.

My research intersects within three rhetorical frameworks: visual design, negative messages, and risk communication. The Venn diagram in Figure 2.1 below illustrates

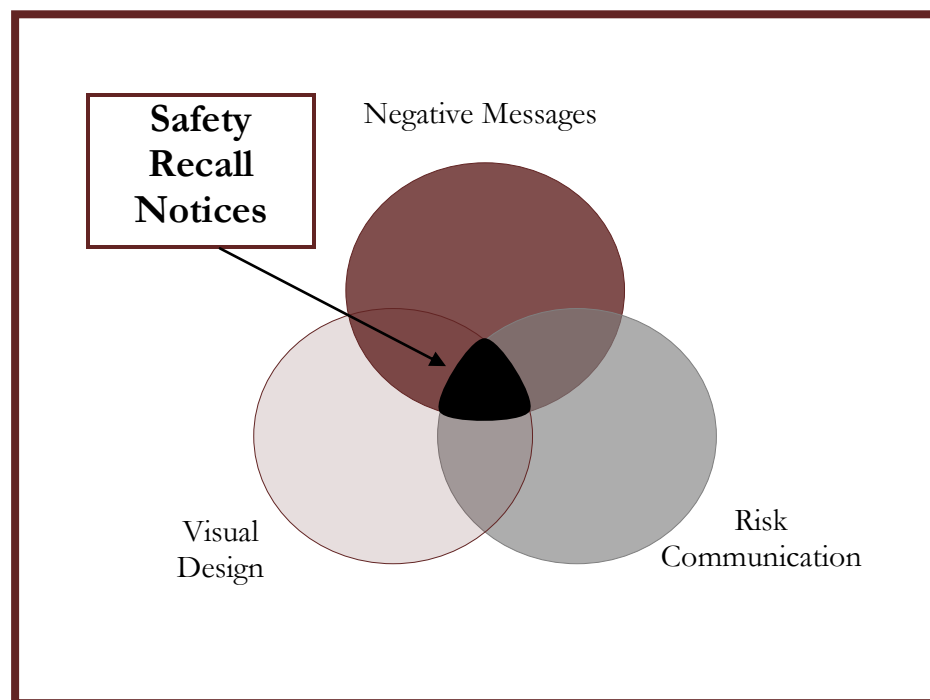


Figure 2.1: Venn diagram of overlapping research areas

this point. The area in the middle of the interlocking circles is where I believe toy safety recall notices align themselves. Throughout this chapter, I explore toy safety recall notices from each of these three areas and demonstrate how professional communication scholarship aids in situating the notices.

Visual Design

The genre of toy safety recall notices is highly visual since communicators specifically choose the arrangement of type, pictures, and colors used within the notices. In *Visual Thinking*, Rudolf Arnheim (1997/1969) argues that people tend to separate perception and cognition, which establishes an artificial way to understand visual design. He asserts that visual perception *is* visual thinking. Specifically, one mental operation discussed in his text that supports this concept of visual thinking is that memory and experience influence perception. Viewers apply to the present what they have experienced in the past. He writes, “Visual knowledge acquired in the past helps not only in detecting the nature of an object...in the visual field; it also assigns the present object a place in the system of things constituting our total view of the world” (1997/1969, p. 90). In other words, the audience’s past experiences with various warning signs may shape their visual perceptions of toy safety recall notices during my study.

Unfortunately, many existing toy safety recall notices often break conventions of acceptable visual rhetoric that professional communication scholars (Bernhardt, 2003; Brumberger, 2005; Johnson, 1998; Kostelnick, 1998; Kostelnick, 1996; Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998; and Kimball & Hawkins, 2008) have argued actually assist readers in understanding professional documents. For example, some toy safety recall notices often use small point sizes, inconsistent typefaces, and incorrect emphasis. How will audience perceptions of toy safety recall notices be shaped if they draw on their past experiences with poorly designed documents?

The typography of a given document can have a profound effect on its audience. Some typographers argue that typefaces should disappear so that the content of a message comes through with utmost clarity (Felici, 2003). Regrettably, typeface selection can be one of the widest variations in toy safety recall notices. Generally speaking, serif typefaces are used when designers want to direct a viewer's eye across a page, while sans serif typefaces are typically used when designers want to direct a viewer's gaze down, as is the case for titles, captions, and headings. (Kimball & Hawkins, 2008). If these guidelines held true for toy safety recall notices, major page headings would typically be in sans serif, while the body text used serifs.

In other typographic concerns, document designers suggest that capitalization should be used sparingly, mostly in situations where emphasis is needed. Words lose their shape in all capital letters, which means a reader has to work harder to process a message. Some studies suggest that reading speed decreases by 13-20% when words are set in all capital letters (Schrivers, 1997). In addition, using capitalization for body text

also conveys the sense of shouting at a reader. As will be shown in Chapter 3, however, not all toy safety recall notices adhere to these typeface guidelines.

Document designers, including the creators of toy safety recall notices, routinely use the Gestalt principle of figure-ground contrast for rhetorical purposes. Figure-ground contrast relies on a viewer's ability to perceive differences in visual elements, that is, between the figure and the ground (Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998). The concept of figure-ground can operate on many layers (Schriver, 1997), but I primarily will use it in this study at the typographic level. White text on a black background always has the highest figure-ground contrast.

Beyond typographic issues, another large concern of toy safety recall notices is the visuals that accompany them. Karen Schriver in *Dynamics of Document Design* (1997), like many other professional communication scholars (Bernhardt, 1986, Barton & Barton, 1989; Kienzler, 1997; Kimball & Hawkins, 2008), argues for the importance of clear visuals that directly relate to the text. In Chapter 6, "The Interplay of Words and Pictures," she asserts that effective visuals must interact within the situational context and rhetorical purpose of a document. Moreover, she also insists that visuals ultimately influence the way readers perceive a document, a suggestion that mirrors Arnheim's (1997/1969) idea of visual perception.

Another issue with using visuals concerns their ethics. Kienzler (1997) argues that visuals have more importance and emotional impact than their textual counterparts, yet many visual creators mislead their audience. Even the visual arrangement of a document's text can deceive an audience. For example, Kienzler (1997) cites a case

where an company sent a rate increase notice to customers using solid text, omitting headings and extra spacing, and creating the appearance that the document was only one page, when in reality, the second page housed the negative information. If a toy safety recall notice includes a picture of a toy with no indication of the hazard, is the visual unethical? Moreover, if a toy safety recall notice's text is designed in a way that minimizes the risk associated with the toy, how ethical is the notice?

The art of using color also greatly affects toy safety recall notices. Color theorists have offered many theories on how humans see colors, yet none of these has been widely accepted to explain all color experiences (Zelanski & Fisher, 2006). Nonetheless, some color precepts are generally agreed upon by graphic designers. For example, one rule is that "all colors are affected by the colors around them" (2006, p. 29). On a toy safety recall notice, color will impact how other elements of the document are perceived by the audience. Another generally accepted principle is that colors are dependent on a culture to supply meaning. In the West, people general associate colors like red with the concept of stop or green with go. Moreover, the color of red is generally used to invoke the psychological reaction of drawing attention (Zelanski & Fisher, 2006).

Another element of page design is white space, or the blank space between pictures and textual elements on a page. White space can help set the tone of the document, as well as make its structure clear to the audience. In many instances, white space can also dictate how an audience should use the document (Schraver, 1997). White space will be shown to shape audience perceptions in toy safety recall notices.

Visual design is at the forefront of an article by Gerristen, Van Meurs, and Diepstraten (2001). They surveyed 128 female shoppers, showing them different samples of product recall notices to solicit their views. The study concluded that women preferred the inclusion of a picture, a list format, and no corporate promotion. Recall notices that incorporated these strategies were designated as having more clarity. Furthermore, the study also discovered that the women preferred “warning” as the page heading, finding the word more attention-grabbing than using “attention,” “important notice,” or “recall action” (Gerristen, Van Meurs, & Diepstraten. 2001, p. 265). Although their study was conducted in The Netherlands, American toy safety recall notices do not use a list format or the word “warning” in the notice’s title.

Negative Messages

In addition to visual design, toy safety recall notices also partially align themselves within the rhetorical framework of negative messages because of their main purposes to deliver negative information. Of all the genres of business communication, one can easily argue that negative messages are the most difficult to construct. Even workplace professionals experience trouble when constructing what could be arbitrarily termed “effective” negative news messages (Schryer, 2000).

Like all correspondence, professional communication must pay attention to the content, organization, and language used to deliver the negative news, as well as the

surrounding contexts of the message. However, negative messages are difficult to construct because professional communicators enter this writing situation knowing that their audience will be displeased in some way by the content of the message. In the case of manufacturers creating toy safety recall notices, they construct the notices knowing that the audience does not want to learn their purchased product is faulty and may injure a child. In addition, toy manufacturers often try to construct notices that help to maintain customers and promote resale.

Throughout the past 30 years, many scholars have focused on the genre of negative messages. Some of the research over the years has focused on politeness and persuasive strategies (Campbell, 1990; Graham & David, 1996; Hagge & Kostelnick, 1989), compliance-gaining features (David & Baker, 1994); the use of buffers (Brent, 1985; Limaye, 1988; Mascolini, 1994), interpersonal approaches (Salerno, 1988), and perceived effectiveness of patterns and contextual approaches (Alred, 1993; Suchan & Dulek, 1988), to name a few. Locker (1999) offers a much more comprehensive literature review, ranging from 1974 through 1996, of many articles not mentioned here.

As Locker (1999) implies, many of these articles have been attacks on the models offered in traditional business communication textbooks (Bovee & Thill, 2008; Locker & Kienzler, 2008; Guffey, 2007; Oliu, Brusaw, & Alred, 2007). The model I'm referring to includes steps such as deciding to use a buffer or not, providing reasons before the refusal, stating the refusal clearly and only once, offering alternatives, and ending with a positive close. These models, schema, patterns, or formulas deserve attacks since rhetorical theory leads scholars to question the usefulness of formulas given the situated

nature of communication. Formulaic advice seems particularly non-applicable to toy safety recall notices because the genre doesn't have the typical elements of, say, a business letter or memo.

Nonetheless, scholarship on negative messages does lend some assistance in understanding how toy safety recall notices could be constructed more effectively. For example, Locker (1999) discovers that when constructing negative messages, the communicator should use buffers only when it will be appropriate for the situation; provide reasons for the refusal if it puts the sender's organization in a positive light; present negative news positively and clearly; and forego positive endings, especially those that try for resale (p. 28). However, even more than these findings, the wider implications of Locker's study suggests that the context of the audience should dictate what organizational pattern is used (i.e., direct or indirect). Will choosing a direct approach—stating negative news immediately—or an indirect approach—burying the negative news, perhaps after an apology—in toy safety recall notices change consumer perceptions about the notices and their creators?

Locker's finding on context concurs with Carolyn Miller's (1984) disciplinary landmark essay on genre. She argues that the contexts and actions of discourse communities shape rhetorical genres, not their substance. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the contexts of the toy safety recall genre and how the risks associated with the toys are not universal and often change.

Another element of negative messages is the explanations used in them. Limaye (1997) addresses the notion of how much information to use in negative messages. He

believes that providing the reasons for negative news in messages concerns the rights and ethics of the receiver. He goes so far as to advance that it is the “sender’s moral obligation” to provide an explanation (p. 49). Limaye also suggests that explanation should provide reasons on both general levels, connecting to larger contexts of the negative news, and specific levels, which adapt to the reader’s situation. Following his 1997 study with another investigation about explanation in negative messages in 2001, Limaye argues his reason for doing so is that no other scholars have broached the subject since his earlier article. Using two new theoretical lenses to examine the negative messages, Limaye once again argues that full explanation is always needed.

This strategy of specifically targeting the receivers of negative news with full explanations, he believes, will reduce ill feelings toward the sender and help gain compliance. His advice is targeted to routine business correspondences. Toy safety recall notices rarely provide explanations.

While Limaye’s articles offer theoretical perspectives on explanation in negative correspondences, his study does not examine correspondences created within “real” rhetorical contexts. In fact, few recent studies examine messages produced within the context of an actual organization, except for Crombie and Samujh (1999) and Schryer (2000).

Schyer (2000) attempts to determine the “effectiveness” of insurance claim letters denying long-term disability benefits and understand the letters’ production process. The letters she investigates were appealed 66% of the time. Throughout her investigation, which relies on genre and socio-cultural theoretical lenses, she discovers issues with the

expression used in the letters. The style contained complex sentence constructions often written at a level that was beyond even college-level readers.

Schryer concludes that construction processes for these letters, which included legal policies and employed the traditional negative message pattern, resulted in many policyholders rejecting the bad news. Through her investigation, which included interviews of claims workers and application of readability formulas to the letters, she determines that “effective” negative letters provide more autonomy to readers and portray them as capable of taking action. As is true of any case study, the findings are limited because what works in this particular context, may not work in another.

In another study, Graham (1998) argues that power theory and linguistic politeness ultimately affect how negative messages are constructed. Her study examines two bad news memos: one from a university setting and the other from a manufacturing company. Graham finds that higher-level politeness strategies grant more power to readers and the choices of politeness strategies are bound by the context in which the message is constructed and received.

Like Graham’s (1998) findings on politeness strategies, Gurau and Serban (2005) examine how the linguistic features of style can impact a product recall message. In this article, they examine the structure of recall messages in the United Kingdom by comparing them to a guide published by the Department of Trade and Industry. The authors cite a large body of scholarship on public relations, and they fill a large gap because no previous study has examined public relation scholarship in connection to product recall messages. The purpose of their study, as noted by Gurau and Serban, is to

“not only analyse the existence of the required information categories in the product recall messages published in the UK, but also to question and analyse the style and the wording of this information, using the interpretive methods of discourse analysis” (p. 330). The authors offer some interesting implications of their study. For example, they suggest that product recall messages rarely adapt to the degree of danger associated with the product. Moreover, organizations distance themselves through language from defective products, and most recall messages serve a promotional function. These are all useful findings to consider when exploring perceptions of toy safety recall notices.

Similar to Gurau and Serban(2005), Van Waes and Van Wijk (2001) examine politeness perceptions of product recall notices. They provide audiences with product recall documents that use positive politeness features (active voice, apology, personal pronouns, and hedging) and negative politeness features (passive voice, no apology, and no hedging) to determine which approach is more effective. They find that negative politeness strategies that use passive voice and respect the audience are appreciated by consumers and elicit better perceptions of the corporation compared to positive politeness strategies. In fact, their participants viewed the positive politeness strategies in product recall notices as “patronizing and were irritated by them” (2001, p. 277). However, when Van Waes and Van Wijk add a second dimension, levels of risk, to the product recall messages, they discover that using extra politeness features does not bring about a higher acceptance of the message. Therefore, this study suggests that the degree of danger associated with the recall changes the applicability of the politeness strategies employed.

Risk Communication

Examining the genre of toy safety recall notices through the professional scholarship on visual design and negative messages is incomplete. Beyond simply informing consumers of negative news, toy safety recall notices have another important purpose—motivating consumers to take immediate action as the result of the risk, namely by returning, removing, or destroying a toy.

With this additional step, toy safety recall notices, therefore, function as risk communication artifacts. Risk communication has a fairly recent history, mostly dating to nuclear power plant construction in the 1960s and 70s (Powell, 1996). Many disciplines have laid claim to risk communication including sociology, risk assessment, cultural studies, cognitive psychology, actuary statistics, and communication studies—complete with competing models.

Risk communication usually focuses on large scale disasters—coal mines (Sauer, 2003; 2006), nuclear and hazard waste sites (Kasperson et al., 2005; Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 2005), public health (Lundgren, 1994; Powell & Leiss, 1997), natural disasters, etc.—which have the potential to affect a larger number of people immediately with one incident than, say, one faulty toy. However, few studies use risk communication as a theoretical lens to examine an entire genre of documents. On the one hand, examining toy safety recall notices as a genre through the lens opens a new use of risk communication scholarship. On the other hand, the applicability of some traditional risk communication theories may be limited.

Some long-standing models of risk communication focus all their attention on what the experts (scientists, statisticians) can predict for instance, who is at risk, how great is the danger, how easily can it be avoided (Grabill & Simmons, 1998). In other words, much of the information about risk is quantified with no consideration for the public's perception about the risks. This quantified information is communicated to the public on an as-needed basis; the need, of course, is determined by the scientists. Any resistance to the communication about risk by the public was seen as problematic. Therefore, some scholars started to use psychometric scales to assess the public's reception of risk and to align their perceptions with the "expert" opinions in the tradition of scientific rationality (Slovic, 1987).

Within the past fifteen years, rhetoricians devoted more attention to the theories of risk communication. Grabill and Simmons (1998), among others such as Mirel (1994), Sauer (2003), and Miller (2003), argue against these earlier models, suggesting their linear approaches to risk are "arhetorical." Moreover, like Miller (2003), Grabill and Simmons suggest that risk analysis should not be discrete from risk communication; they are one and the same.

Grabill and Simmons (1998) call for a model of risk communication that is socially constructed and accounts for variations in audiences and additional contextual considerations. Unlike the psychometric approaches, which tend to generalize and quantify perceptions of risk (Slovic, 1986), the approach Grabill and Simmons promote considers specific audiences in context-specific situations. They argue

Rather than a linear flow of technical information from the risk assessors to the public, risk communication becomes a web, a network, an interactive process of exchanging information, opinions, and values among all involved parties. (p. 425)

The public can add their localized perspectives to the decisions about risk, such as why starting a nuclear reactor plant may not be in the best interests of a neighborhood. In other words, a socially constructed model of risk adds a participatory role for audiences in decision-making processes, which could help overcome typical public resistance to risk communications.

Another model of risk communication highlights the social amplification of risk, which tries to account for the ways that cultural and individual characteristics tend to magnify certain risks (Kasperson et al., 2005). For instance, the authors believe “there is no such thing as ‘true’ (absolute) and ‘distorted’ (socially determined) risk” (Kasperson, et al., 2005, p. 105). Rather, the social amplification process is paramount in determining the severity of the risk. A message is considered amplified when it has been consistently brought to the public’s attention. Senders have the ability to amplify a message by choosing what to include and how to distribute the message. Conversely, it may also be useful to ask what is left out or not being amplified and why.

Kasperson et al. (2005) describe amplification as a process in their writing (pp. 106-108). A signal, or message, is created by a sender who selects what parts are emphasized or included. Once the message has left the sender, a “station” amplifies the message. These stations then send the message on to users or people who are at risk. In

turn, these people decide on their behavior in terms of the risk and their interpretation of the risk. This behavior spreads the impact, which could then affect others, including the “victims.” This amplification of risk model will be applied to toy safety recall notices in Chapter 3.

What motivates consumers to act on a toy safety risk, thereby amplifying it, can hinge on two main factors: perception of the risk and effectiveness of the risk communication targeted at the specific audience. In terms of perception of risk, Sjöberg (2000) investigates how people estimate risk when the hazard is aimed at themselves, their family, or other people in general. His results suggest that people have “risk denial” about themselves, indicating they are less likely to be affected. In addition, the participants in his study believe their family is slightly more at risk than themselves and that the general public is much more at risk. Another component he discovers is that when people believe they have control over the danger, their “risk denial” increases. Sjöberg’s findings will be applied to toy safety recall notices in Chapter 4 and then invoked again when I discuss the results from the survey in Chapter 5.

The other motivation factor involves how well the risk communication is targeted at a specific audience. Risk communicators recognize that “since many different publics exist, a variety of strategies will be necessary to reach the full spectrum of social groups” (Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 2005, p. 47). A one-size-fits-all, universal approach to risk communication should be avoided at all costs. Agreeing with this notion, Powell (1996) suggests that the development of effective risk communication rests on the understanding that individuals are unique and respond differently to a

message based on their knowledge and personal experiences with the risk. Therefore, do toy safety recall notices need to be more personalized to help individuals take the appropriate action? In this case, the scholarship on risk communication aligns well with the scholarship on negative messages, which suggests the context of the communication situation should be adapted to the audience.

Finally, Johnson-Sheehan (2010) insists that all safety information should inform readers about three elements. First, the communication should state the hazard clearly. Second, the communication should explain the seriousness of the hazard. And third, audiences should be told how to avoid injury. In the case of toy safety recall notices, most should encourage readers to remove the hazardous toy from the child. This approach for conveying safety information will be explored in Chapter 3 and 5.

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CHAPTER 3: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter contains a rhetorical analysis which includes an evaluation of the visual and verbal strategies of toy safety recall notices. I begin by highlighting the rhetorical situation of the notices. In addition to being an extension of the scholarly ideas from Chapter 2, this chapter also outlines the real world contexts of toy safety recall notices. While all contexts provide insights into toy safety recall notices, no one context alone can provide a complete picture. This rhetorical analysis chapter is important because it establishes the terrain of toy safety recall notices and helps to ground my survey and its design.

Audience

The audiences of toy safety recall notices vary widely and as is true for most documents, multiple audience layers exist. Specifically, toy safety recall notices have primary, secondary, auxiliary, and watchdog audiences.

An initial assessment of the notices shows that they are targeted at anyone raising a child. These people are the primary audience because they have the power to decide to act on the message. When they return home after viewing a toy safety recall notice in a retail setting, people who raise children will be the ones to make a decision about whether to return, remove, or destroy a toy or to ignore the message.

The demographics of the primary audience are extremely broad. For instance, people who have different levels of education and reading abilities may be affected. Their ages can range from teens to 90s. The audience may include people from both genders, as well as different races and ethnicities. Native or non-native speakers of English are also included in the audience. Moreover, toy safety recall notices affect audiences from various socio-economic classes. Toy manufacturers must consider the complex backgrounds of the primary audience when they create toy safety recall notices.

Furthermore, toy manufacturers face an even harder challenge because people beyond a child's guardians can serve as audience members. For instance, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, even close friends of the family, to name a few, may serve this secondary audience role. After viewing the toy safety recall notices, these people may encourage the primary audience to act on the risk. Secondary audiences also include lawyers and other personnel who may use the notices in future court cases.

Auxiliary audiences include anyone that does not have a close connection to a child and who happens upon a toy safety recall message in the toy aisle, customer service, or some other location of a retail store. While this audience will most likely not act on the basis of the message, the notices may shape their opinions of toy manufacturers or retail stores. In the future, they may base decisions about purchasing toys from a specific toy company based on a previous encounter with a toy safety recall notice.

Finally, watchdog audiences, those that do not have the power to stop the message but do have social, political, or economic power, include organizations like the

CPSC, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), and other citizen advocacy groups, such as Kids in Danger, Public Citizen, Consumer Union, and the Consumer Federation of America.

Purpose

Like the audiences of toy safety recall notices, the purposes vary greatly. While the outward primary purpose of the notices may be to protect children and keep them safe from hazards associated with a faulty toy, I question whether this is the actual primary purpose. Personally, I believe the main purpose of the toy safety recall notices is to reduce litigation for the toy manufacturer. If it wasn't, toy manufacturers would do a better job of alerting consumers to the danger. For example, they would want their recall notices posted for longer than the suggested CPSC 120-day period and hazards would be displayed more prominently on notices.

Other purposes, of course, include informing the viewers about the risk associated with the toy and persuading them to take action. In some instances, the creator of the notices is also trying to persuade the audience to get in touch with the company. With this additional step, another purpose is enacted—to attempt building goodwill with consumers while rebranding themselves as ethical and responsible toy manufacturers.

The CSPC outlines their own purposes for the notices. According to their *Regulated Products Handbook* (2005), they outline the following objectives of recalls:

1. To locate noncomplying products as quickly as possible;
2. To remove noncomplying products from the distribution chain and from the possession of consumers;
3. To communicate accurate and understandable information in a timely manner to the public about noncomplying product, the hazard, and the corrective action. (pp. 7-8).

Clearly, the government organization has the major purposes of removing the product and communicating necessary risk information to the public. However, the interesting part about their goals is that they do not mention protecting consumers' well-being.

Contexts

The contexts associated with toy safety recall notices are complex because the notices position themselves within the larger web of product recalls. Therefore, this section investigates the political, legal, international, and physical contexts, plus risk amplifications associated with product recalls and their safety notices.

Political and Legal Contexts

As mentioned earlier, the CPSC is the organization responsible for ensuring the safety of products currently on the market. However, the organization has had some problems being effective. The past few presidential administrations provided little support for the actions and facilities the CPSC needs to be effective. Even though the CPSC is responsible for monitoring 15,000 different products, the agency is the nation's smallest. They are direly underfunded. In 2007, their budget was about \$63 million, which is less than double the amount of their startup budget of \$34 million appropriated by the Nixon administration in 1974 (Hitchcock and Mierzwinski, 2008). Even worse, in 2007 the CPSC had **one** toy tester in what PIRG-described as its “decrepit” laboratory (Hitchcock and Mierzwinski, 2008). Since the organization is underfunded and understaffed, they can only request voluntary testing of products from the toy manufacturers; there is no mandatory testing of products produced locally or abroad before they make their way onto store shelves.

After an unprecedented number of recalls in 2007, the year was dubbed the “Year of the Recall” by PIRG and other popular media outlets (Hitchcock and Mierzwinski, 2008; Rooney, 2007; Aucoin, 2007). As a result, the U.S. Congress made an effort to revamp product regulations, including toys, and consumer safety. Congress passed the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) in August of 2008.

Measures in the law will help to strengthen the CPSC and also heighten limitations on faulty toys. For instance, the new law puts limits on the amount of lead

that can be used in products for children under 12 years old (CPSIA, 2008). The new ban on lead commenced on February 10, 2009. As of this date, no toys could contain lead with more than 600 parts per million (ppm). By August 2009, the allowable limit will decrease to 300ppm; by August 2010, the limit is even lower at 100ppm. For lead paint used on toys the standard is different than toys containing lead; the allowable limit will decrease from 600ppm to 90ppm by August 2009 (CPSIA, 2008).

The new law also bans toys that contain three phthalates—DEHP, DBP, and BBP—which are used to soften plastics (CPSIA, 2008). High traces of phthalates have been linked to reproductive defects, premature delivery, early onset of puberty, and lower sperm counts (Hitchcock and Mierzwinski, 2008).

Manufacturers, distributors, and even retailers can all face penalties of up to \$100,000 for non-compliance violations. Product manufacturers are also now required to test their products with independent third-party testers to ensure they are meeting the new requirements. In addition to stricter limitations, CPSIA also increases the funding for the CPSC to \$136 million by 2014 for help with new testing laboratories and greater enforcement measures (CPSIA, 2008).

However, the new law is controversial. For example, some people in the second-hand business are concerned about the new regulations because they too can be fined up to \$100,000 per violation. However, many thrift stores do not have the money or personnel to inspect every toy that is donated to determine if a toy was recalled or if it exceeds lead levels. As a result, some thrift store owners worry the new CPSIA law will greatly reduce sales or put them out of business (Trottman, 2009a). In addition, how will

the CPSC adequately regulate toys that are sold at garage sales or online, which may have been recalled?

In an unpopular move near the end of November 2008, the CPSC decided that it would allow toy manufacturers to sell existing inventory in their warehouses, even if the toys do not meet the new safety requirements of CPSIA (Walker, 2008). Consumer advocacy groups and other critics were outraged and decided to sue the CPSC. In early February 2009, just before the law was to go into effect, one judge overturned the CPSC's stance, banning the sale of the three phthalates mentioned in CPSIA from store shelves, regardless of the amount of inventory (Trottman, 2009b).

A few days before the February 10 implementation date, regulators also changed their mind on new testing standards for lead and phthalates in toys, delaying the mandatory tests for one year. This new decision provides some relief to the costly testing procedures, particularly for those businesses hit by the weakened economy (Pereira and Trottman, 2009). While this new stance will help pocketbooks, I believe it also temporarily weakens toy manufacturers' ethical responsibility for the safety of children.

Overall, the new CPSIA law will be good for consumers and the safety of children. Unfortunately, as is the case with much new legislation, more details need to be fine-tuned before the law can have a strong impact.

International Contexts

Globalization has added increasingly complex supply chain management issues. Parts for a single toy may be manufactured in different facilities or even different countries. For instance, 74% of all recalled products were imports in 2007, with a large portion of that percentage from China (Trottman, 2008).

Some companies use questionable international ethical practices, such as manufacturing knock-off products in foreign countries, using cheap labor, allowing unpaid overtime, or subcontracting work to other foreign companies. These practices are often done to improve the business's bottom line. Simplicity Inc., a manufacturer of cribs, bassinets, and swings, produced its products in foreign countries for a cheaper price. However, questionable practices ended when the company had to recall three of its knock-off products that had caused the deaths of multiple babies (Oneal, 2008). This example demonstrates why some companies choose foreign manufacturing facilities and what's at stake for safety.

However, even companies that are careful with how their business operates can find themselves in trouble because of complex supply chains. Mattel, the world's largest toymaker, monitors its suppliers in a "state-of-the-art approach" (Stitch, 2008, p. 14). Yet in 2007, the company recalled 345,000 Batman action figures, 253,000 "Sarge" cars from the *Cars* movie, 683,000 Barbies, 1 million Doggie Daycare play sets, and 675,000 various Barbie accessories all within a two week period (CPSC, 2009). To make matters worse, the head of the Chinese company that was responsible for over one million of

the recalled Mattel toys committed suicide (Barboza, 2007). After the recall fallout, Mattel's CEO, Robert Eckert, promised to increase the inspections of foreign paint batches and other manufacturing practices (Casey and Zamiska, 2007). He even created a video apology on the company's website.

Globalization is a difficult issue, particularly as more products sold in the United States are manufactured abroad. Moreover, globalization seems to raise an ethical bind with consumers' demands. On the one hand, they insist on low prices, on the other, they desire safe products. These two demands often conflict in global business practices.

Physical Contexts and Other Channels

Every recalled toy is listed on the CPSC website. While some people have easy internet access, many do not, particularly those from lower economic classes. For these people without access, two other options exist for being informed about toy safety recalls. First, they could possibly learn about the toy recalls on their local news channel. Typically, however, only large-number recalls (i.e. close to one million or more units) make the evening news. Therefore, this is not a viable option for many toy recalls.

Second, consumers may encounter the paper toy safety recall notices posted at a local store. However, the physical location of these postings could greatly impact how many people will view them. Through a non-scientific investigation of recall notice locations in local stores, I discovered that most notices are in three places: in the toy aisle, by customer service, or in a layaway department. While the toy aisle may be a

viable option, the other two are suspicious. Unless customers have a specific purpose for going to customer service or the layaway department during a store visit, they could miss the recall notices entirely. In addition, I've seen toy safety recall notices in unmarked binders in these two locations. The notices are not easily visible to people unless they make an effort to search for them. Though I've personally never seen toy safety recall notices posted on the front windows of retail stores, this spot seems like another reasonable location.

Another physical context issue is that these notices are only posted in stores where the toy was sold. Cara Smith, deputy chief at the Illinois attorney general's office argues that "Once bad products are out there, not many come back because you almost have to be in the right place at the right time to even hear about a recall" (as cited in Look, 2009, p. 15). For example, if I'm a parent and purchased a toy from Store G and Store G happens to be the only retailer of that particular toy, I would only be able to view a recall notice at Store G. If I do most of my shopping at Store J, I may never come in contact with the toy safety recall notice.

In many cases, the recovery rates of toys as the result of recalls are low. For example, 190,500 Kool Toyz Playsetts were recalled from stores in 2006 for lead that far exceeded safety standards. A year after the recall only 766 of the toys were returned (Look, 2009). This means that only 0.4% of the toys were returned and 99.6% of the total units are unaccounted for, possibly endangering children! While it is possible that some consumers saw the notice but decided it was easier to discard the toy than to

return it, I'm arguing that a large contingent of consumers never saw the poorly constructed toy safety recall notice that accompanied the Kool Toyz Playsets.

Clearly, there are ramifications to stores for placing toy safety recall notices in highly visible locations. Ideally, the more people who see the notices, the more people will take action. However, this action may result in more work for the store—by increased volume of people coming to customer service, added duties for stockers, or labor for returns.

Stores placing the notices in highly visible locations could potentially lose customers who distrust them for selling unsafe products. Essentially, the retailers face credibility issues as the result of someone else's faulty manufacturing processes and lax safety standards. If customers walk into a toy aisle and see 15-20 toy safety recall notices (as was the case at almost any given time throughout the 2007—Year of the Recall), will they purchase toys from that retailer? Or will they feel more confident buying from another store who posts the toy safety recall notices by customer service or in the layaway departments out of sight?

During an initial attempt to collect toy safety recall notices for my pilot study, I was informed by a customer service representative that I was not allowed to photocopy the toy safety recall notices. The store had no photocopier for public use. In addition, I was also informed that taking pictures was prohibited because it violated store policy. While these policies may not hold true for all retail stores, my experience does raise a larger question about the contexts in which these notices function. If consumers cannot photocopy, take pictures of the notices, or have easy access to the internet, how can they

use the toy safety recall notices for reference? The notices contain phone numbers, model numbers, websites, and instructions. Average customers, who may have toddlers pulling on their shirt tails or a cart with a screaming baby, should not be expected to bring a clipboard, paper, and pen to the toy aisle just to obtain safety information about a product they may own.

Another physical issue with recalled toys is registration information. With many other types of recalled products—tires, cars, electronics—the manufacturer will usually have an easier time getting in touch with consumers because some users send in registration cards. Also, car dealers have customer lists that store contact information.

For example, let's suppose I own a Blu-ray, and there is a safety recall for the player, which for whatever manufacturing reason has the potential to short circuit. Even though many people do not register their products, the manufacturer may potentially have an easier time alerting me about the hazard if I did send in the product registration for the Blu-ray. Moreover, I may be more inclined to act on the recall because of its price. On the other hand, with children's toys, consumers are more likely not to send in (or even have the option to send in) a registration card. The manufacturer most likely will have a more difficult time alerting consumers, who ultimately make a choice for the well-being of a child. Since many toys are significantly less of an investment than Blu-ray players, the consumers may be more inclined to discard the toy rather than get a replacement product. This obviously works in the manufacturer's interest, but it may also mean that unsafe toys enter the used-toy pipeline (i.e., donated toys to day cares or second-hand stores).

Amplification of Risk Contexts

Toy safety recalls follow an amplification process (Kasperson et. al. 2005) outlined in Chapter 2, as the risks associated with them are communicated to consumers. The toy manufacturer (sender) in conjunction with the CPSC creates the toy safety recall message. They choose to highlight certain parts of the risk while downplaying other parts of the risk associated with a toy by sheer inclusion in the message and other visual design choices. The toy manufacturer sends the message to the “station”—in this case, the retail stores who sold the faulty toys. The stores then relay the risk message to consumers by posting the toy safety recall notices in toy aisles, customer service areas, other parts of the store, and even on their websites. The consumers who see the toy safety recall notices then make an evaluation of the risk, based on their perception of risk from viewing the notice as well as their knowledge of the child who owns the toy. The consumer’s next move enacts how amplified the risk associated with a toy will become.

In some situations, the consumer will be the parent who makes a risk decision for the “victim,” in this case the child, who owns the toy. In other cases, the consumer may be the one to alert a parent about a particular toy recall, still having an impact on a child at risk. In other cases, consumers may amplify the message by talking to local media outlets or discussing faulty recalled toys in internet forums. Consumers can also stop the amplification process by doing nothing.

Much of the amplification of the risk associated with toys is contingent on the exigencies of risk perception. If applying Sjöberg's (2000) findings, outlined in Chapter 2, to toy safety recall notices, we see that consumers' perception of risk may determine their future actions of removing, returning, or destroying a toy or simply doing nothing. Toy safety recall notices are unique as a genre because their target audience is not the person who is at risk. If the at-risk person is a family member, then Sjöberg (2000) would suggest that the consumer is more likely to act as a result of the toy safety recall notice since his study found that people believe their families are slightly more at risk than themselves.

Of course, some parents may decide that their child is not someone who puts toys in his or her mouth and, therefore, they do not have to worry about recalls for magnet aspiration or lead ingestion. In this instance, Sjöberg would refer to their perceptions as "risk denial," where consumers believe they have control over a risk. Another example would be parents who feel they can monitor their child so that some dangers would not be relevant, for instance, watching to make sure a child doesn't put toys containing lead paint into his or her mouth.

Visual Language Analysis

While exploring the complex contexts of toy safety recall notices is a start, I consider the visual language of the actual notices in this section. I use Kostelnick and

Roberts' (1998) Visual Language Matrix as a method of visual analysis. Their matrix considers textual, spatial, and graphical elements from micro to macro levels within a

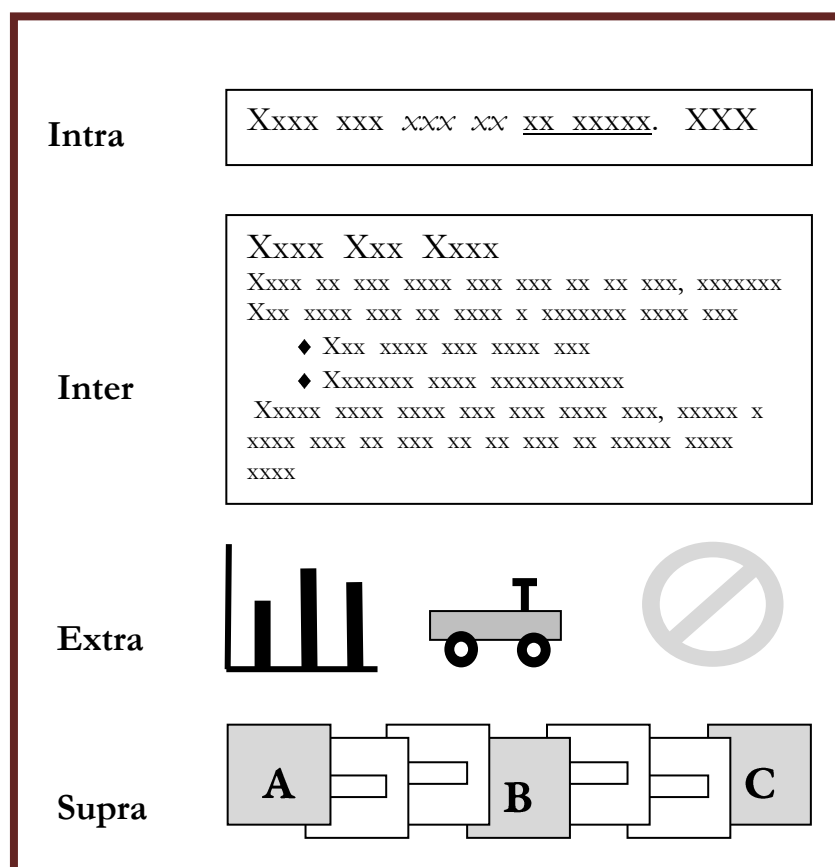


Figure 3.1: Kostelnick and Roberts' Visual Language Guide (p. 85)

given document, defined at intra-, inter-, extra-, and supra-levels of design (see Figure 3.1).

The smallest component of their matrix is the intra-level of design. In this level, typeface selection, as well as size, spacing between text, and variations within a line

of text are evaluated.

In terms of typeface selection, look at Figures 3.2 and 3.3 (Toy Island, 2007; Toy World, 2007). Notice how the toy safety recall notice for the Hello Kitty Diary uses a serif typeface for the main “safety recall” title, the danger, and the product name, while the rest of the notice uses a sans serif typeface. On the other hand, the entire document for the Elite Operations toy uses a sans serif typeface. Typically, serif typefaces are used when designers want to direct a viewer’s gaze across a page (Kimball & Hawkins, 2008).

As a result, the serif typeface used on the Hello Kitty notice directs the viewer's eye across the top of the page, instead of downward to focus on the hazard associated with the toy.



Figure 3.2: Example of inconsistent typefaces

The underlining used on the Elite Operations title also prevents a goal of directing a viewer's eyes downward. After reading the "safety recall" title, the viewer is

told to stop by the underline instead of continuing down. Once again, the main message is muffled as a result of the toy safety recall's title typography. A better solution would



Figure 3.3: Another example of inconsistent typefaces

be to use only a san serif typeface with no underlining to visually allow the viewer to focus on the sign's main message.

Another intra-level design issue deals with the capitalization of typefaces. Some use capitalization in ways that do not achieve the best possible results according to

scholarship on the issue (Schriver, 1997). For example, the toy safety recall notice for Thomas the Train accessories (see Figure 3.4 below (RC2 Corp, 2007)) uses all capital letters throughout the entire notice, with the exception of the product names. Since using all capitals slows comprehension, the use of capital letters for the Thomas the Train accessories recall does not help consumers who want to quickly read the notice's content and make a clear decision about the risk. Moreover, excessive capitalization conveys the sense of shouting at a reader, which could also impact the ethos of the RC2 Corporation.

The inter-level is the next design level that is discussed by Kostelnick and Roberts (1998) on their visual matrix. In this level, headings and numbers are important for chunking components as well as creating a visual hierarchy on a page. In addition, the inter-level is also concerned with how well shading, bullets, and other line work help readers to decipher a message. In Figure 3.4 below, the pictures and captions for the accessories are aligned in rows and columns that allow a reader to clearly see a visual hierarchy. In this case, the hierarchy suggests that all of the accessories deserve equal attention. In addition, the notice also uses dotted linework to visually promote grouping of accessories that were sold together.

SAFETY RECALL

EXCESS LEVELS OF LEAD

AFFECTING SURFACE PAINT ON SPECIFIC VEHICLES AND SET COMPONENTS
FROM THE THOMAS & FRIENDS WOODEN RAILWAY PRODUCT LINE

**NOTE: If the code marked on the bottom of your product (or the inside of the battery door)
contains a "WJ" or "AZ", then that product is NOT included in this recall.**

 <p>Red James Engine (TRU skn# 939498)</p> <p>Red James # 5 Coal Tender (TRU skn# 939498)</p>	 <p>Red Skarloey Engine Skarloey (TRU skn# 939897)</p>	 <p>Brown & Yellow Old Slow Coach Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>
 <p>Red Lights & Sounds James Engine (TRU skn# 219681)</p> <p>Red James # 5 Lights & Sounds Coal Tender (TRU skn# 219681)</p>	 <p>Red Holiday Caboose Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>	 <p>Red Baggage Car (TRU skn# 113522)</p>
 <p>James Engine with Team Colors (TRU skn# 115126)</p> <p>James # 5 Coal Tender with Team Colors (TRU skn# 115126)</p>	 <p>Yellow Railroad Crossing Sign Sold in oval set Style# LC99561 (TRU skn# 113522) Also sold in Bridge & Crane Figure 8 set Style# LC99567 (TRU skn# 451886)</p>	 <p>Red "Sodor Mail" Car Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>
 <p>Yellow & Green Box Car Sold in Conductor's Figure 8 Set Style# LC99535 (TRU skn# 420905)</p> <p>Red Sodor Line Caboose Sold in Conductor's Figure 8 set Style# LC99535 (TRU skn# 420905)</p>	 <p>Red Stop Sign Sold in Conductor's Figure 8 set Style# LC99535 (TRU skn# 420905)</p>	 <p>Red Coal Car Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>
 <p>Sodor Smelting Yard (TRU skn# 113468)</p>	 <p>Sodor Ice Cream Factory (TRU skn# 377562)</p>	 <p>Deluxe Sodor Fire Station Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>
 <p>Yellow "Sodor Cargo Co." Cargo Piece Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>	 <p>Red Fire Brigade Truck Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>	
 <p>Red Water Tanker Truck Sold in LC99196A Fire Crew (TRU skn# 112151)</p>	 <p>Red Coal Car Labeled "2006 Day Out With Thomas" Affected item not sold at Toys R Us</p>	

THESE SPECIFIC ITEMS MAY CONTAIN LEAD PAINT THAT IS TOXIC
IF INGESTED BY YOUNG CHILDREN AND MAY CAUSE ADVERSE HEALTH AFFECTS.
TAKE THESE TOYS AWAY FROM CHILDREN IMMEDIATELY AND CALL RC2 TOLL FREE AT:

1-866-725-4407
OR VISIT US AT <http://recalls.rc2.com>
TO RECEIVE RETURN AND REPLACEMENT DETAILS.
OR RETURN THE RECALLED PRODUCT TO YOUR LOCAL TOYS"R"US FOR A FULL REFUND.
(POST UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30, 2007)

Figure 3.4: Example of recall with excessive capitalization

Another inter-level design element is figure-ground contrast. In Figure 3.5 below

(Fisher-Price, 2008), notice how the black box in the middle of the toy safety recall notice draws the most attention. This box is an example of the principle of figure-ground contrast in action. The information in the box, coincidentally, provides


Safety Recall

Fisher-Price® Learning Pots & Pans™

Model Numbers: In the US: G6685

Sold Since: October 1, 2007


Choking Hazard



Examine the bottom of the blue pan. The pan should contain six screws. If any screws are missing, contact Fisher-Price to arrange for the return of the blue pan for a replacement.

Call Fisher-Price anytime for more information.
1-888-521-0820
www.service.mattel.com

To be posted through February 2009



In cooperation with U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Skn #078179

Figure 3.5: Example of toy recall with high figure-ground contrast

instructions on what a consumer needs to do to determine if a child is at risk.

On the other hand, is the information highlighted the most important on the Fisher Price Learning Pots & Pans toy safety recall notice? By emphasizing the action a consumer should take so heavily in reverse type, other elements of the page

get secondary or tertiary emphasis. On many toy safety recall notices, the visuals typically get the most emphasis because, as a culture, we are drawn to visuals. Here, the

consumer will most likely look at the reverse type black box before examining the product visuals. A greater concern, however, is that even though the hazard—choking—is in red, the size and placement promotes maybe, at best, a tertiary emphasis compared to the high figure-ground contrast of the text box. One could even argue the Fisher-Price logo gets more attention because of its larger size and our culture's proclivity toward red (Zelanski & Fisher, 2006).

Extra-level design is next in Kostelnick and Roberts' visual matrix. Extra-level is concerned with pictures, icons and other symbols and how they work to complement and enhance the text fields. Text only matters in this level if it is used as a caption, call-out, or a description of a visual.

Visuals must function within a given situation to help achieve a communication purpose (Schriver, 1997). Despite the existing knowledge about the importance of

visuals, some toy safety recall notices display the toy but give no clear visual indication of the danger to

children. The CPSC guidelines



Figure 3.6: Example of recall using a call-out

state that call-outs should be used to indicate identifying information (CPSCP, 2005).

However, toy safety recall notices rarely use visual call-outs like the one shown in Figure 3.6 above (RC2, 2008). In this example, the call-out is used to showcase the Winnie the Pooh design which uses lead paint.

In other cases, some toy safety recall notices contain model numbers as a visual element (Mega Brands, 2008). See Figure 3.7 below as an example. While these numbers are useful for determining which specific products are recalled, consumers will have a difficult time if they are standing in the toy aisle looking at this table and trying to determine if a child they know owns the affected toy.

Name of Product	Model #	Name of Product	Model #
Magtastik Starter Set	427	40 Piece Tub	468
Magtastik Deluxe Set	428	Deluxe New Starter Set	467
Primary	429	Wonder Coaster	465
Primary Starter	431	Starter Set – New Parts	496
Car	434	Magnimals – Monkey	424
Helicopter	435	Magnimals – Dog	425
Fun Pack	448	Magnimals – Dinosaur	426
Jumbo 24 Piece Bag	456	Magnimals Assortment	423
Round Bag	461	Mag Mobile Assortment	433

Figure 3.7: Example of table containing product names and model numbers

Still other visuals like Figures 3.8 and 3.9 are blurry. The image in Figure 3.7, in its fuzzy state, was taken directly from the CPSC's website (First Learning, 2008). The words and UPC serial numbers are so distorted that the picture offers little assistance to upset and/or confused consumers who possibly own the toy. In addition, the visual in Figure 3.8 was copied directly from a safety recall notice for the Evenflo ExerSaucer Triple Fun product (Evenflo, 2009a). For this toy, the CPSC reports nine injuries from

children falling, one of which involved a broken collarbone (Evenflo, 2009b).

While the visual provides nice attention with the arrows to the end cap that can cause the fall hazard, the visual of the toy is so pixilated that a consumer will have a hard time determining details and deciding if they have this toy, particularly if there are models similar to the one shown. Shriver would argue

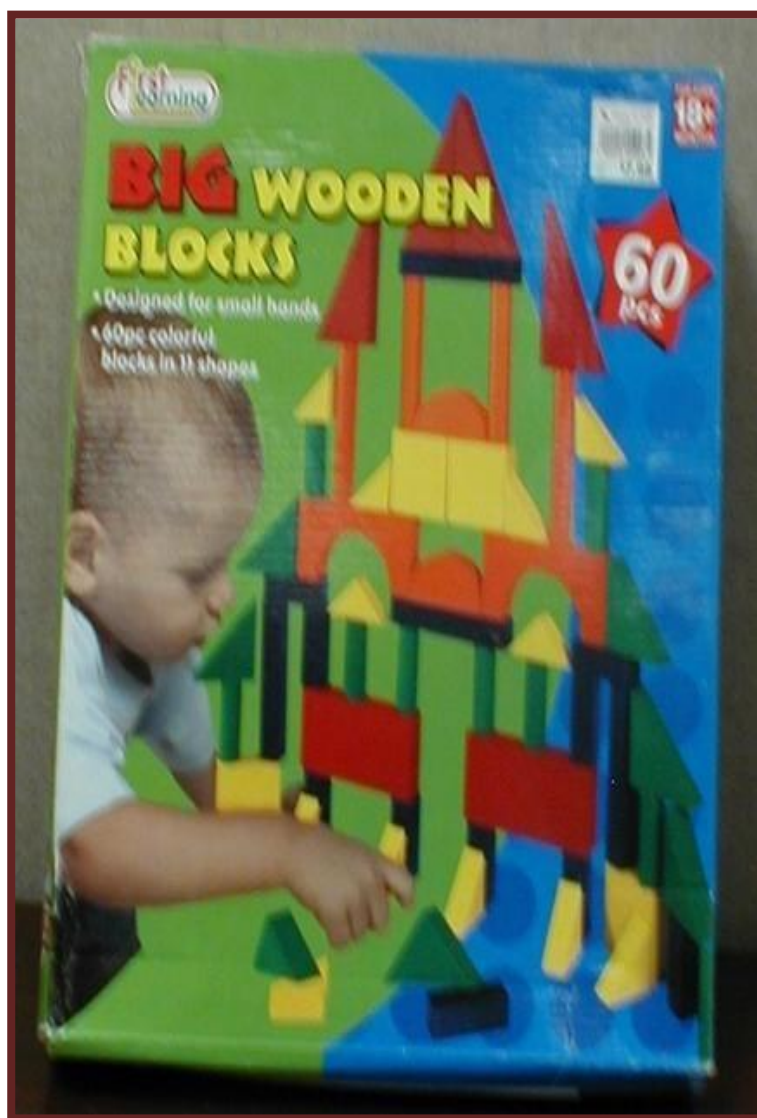


Figure 3.8: Example of blurry visual CPSC website.

that the above table of numbers or the blurry visuals

pictured here are not effectively interacting within the rhetorical situation of the toy safety recall notice. As a result, many poorly designed visual elements could prevent consumers from even reading the toy safety recall notices and thus hinder their effectiveness.



Figure 3.9: Another example of blurry visual from recall notice

The final level of the visual language matrix is the supra-level design. In this level, the large-scale document design choices are considered. These include elements

like color, paper

choice and orientation, page headers and footers, as well as the organization of the overall document. Since toy safety recall notices are not as complex as an annual report, many of the elements of this category are non-applicable.

However, a few elements do still apply. Color is a major one. When the toy safety recall notices are first produced, they presumably are in color because all of the images on the CPSC website use color. The CPSC handbook suggests that in-store notices should “use color to make posters stand out” (2005, p. 9). However, once these signs are distributed to retailers, they may be photocopied in black and white, as I’ve seen numerous stores that used black and white toy safety recall notices. The lack of color could make the hazard difficult to understand or confuse viewers who may be trying to determine if they own the product. Color helps to initially attract attention. It also adds

details to pictures on the notices, and consumers often recognize products by colors and shapes.

Another supra-level design element is the size of the paper. In all of the notices I have examined in various retail stores, I've yet to find a single notice that uses anything but the standard 8.5" x 11" page size. Interestingly, the CPSC "recommends that posters be 11 x 17 inches but not smaller than 8.5 x 11" (CPSC, 2005, p. 10). It would be interesting to test whether a larger paper size attracts more consumer attention and if consumers are more likely to act on the hazard associated with the toy.

Finally, the one other unifying piece of information on a supra-level that can be found in all safety recall notices is the "Post until [120 days from recall announcement] date" and "In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission." Visually, this information is treated somewhat like a page footer, as it can be found on every toy safety recall notice. All toy safety recall notices must be approved by the CPSC before they can be distributed to retailers (CPSC, 2005).

Verbal Language Analysis

Although toy safety recall notices are highly visual documents, they do contain some text which should be analyzed to fully understand the genre.

Text used on toy safety recall notices frequently adheres to suggestions put forth by the CPSC. For instance, the guidelines suggest including the terms "safety" and

“recall” in the title. All of the toy safety recall notices used as examples in this chapter use the “Safety Recall” heading. However, some notices use variations. For example, the Cinderella Ride-On Car and the MangaMen notices from Chapter 1 use “safety notice” and “recall notice,” respectively. The connotation of both of these phrases is slightly different from “safety recall.”

Most toy safety recall notices contain a picture of the toy, a toll-free phone number, and in some cases, a website address. The CPSC handbook for regulated products also suggests the notices should be “BRIEF” and “require far fewer words than a news release” (2005, p. 9, capitals theirs). For example, here is the major body text from one safety recall:

Lead Hazard with Metal Clasp. For a replacement bag, contact the The Bonne Bell Company. (2008)

While this text exemplifies the brevity called for by the CPSC, I question its effectiveness because the message never instructs the audience to remove the toy. Shall a child continue playing with the toy until a new glamour accessory bag is received?

Here is an example of major body text that does tell a reader what to do:

Playart Klixy Ocean Flower Jewelry has been RECALLED. It was found that the BUTTERFLY CHARMS included in the set have unacceptable levels of lead. Please remove this product immediately from children. For more information or return instructions, contact Bojeux Toys. (2007; capitals theirs)

The text, by using “please,” politely asks the consumer to remove the toy immediately. However, what do the capital letters suggest? Can an audience infer from the capitals that *only* the butterfly charms included in this set contains high levels of lead? This inference is not entirely clear from the notice and could be untrue. This example also demonstrates the difficulty of trying to separate verbal and visual practices of toy safety recall notices. The capital letters are a visual choice that has verbal implications.

Perhaps the butterfly is *only* a small component of the jewelry set. A consumer who views the notice might be inclined to simply remove and/or destroy that particular charm instead of going through the replacement process by contacting Bojeux. If the audience elects this route, they ultimately will save Bojeux Toys money by not paying for the replacement part (and possibly shipping fees). This textual ambiguity, perhaps, is purposeful on the part of the toy manufacturer. How many toy manufacturers go through their legal obligations of issuing a recall and creating a notice, but make the replacement process complex so as to discourage consumers from following through?

A larger issue with the text in the second example, however, is the passive construction—a textual trait that appears in a large number of toy safety recall notices. “It was found that butterfly charms...”—who *exactly* did the finding? Why does Bojeux, and so many other toy manufacturers, fail to provide the agent of this action? Why is nobody at fault? Why aren’t the excessive lead levels found *before* the products were stocked on shelves?

Finally, I offer one more toy safety recall notice (Mattel, 2007) for textual considerations (see Figure 3.10 below). The major body text on this notice reads:

The paint decorating the toys may contain excessive levels of lead which can cause adverse health effects.

MATTEL

Safety Recall

Fisher-Price Go Diego Go Animal Rescue Boat K3413

Lead Hazard

Sold since June 1, 2007

Carried at Toys R Us			
Description	Item Specific MFR #	Assortment MFR	SKU
Go Diego Go Animal Rescue Boat	K3413	N/A	275484

Products with date codes between 137-7HF and 223-7HF on the product itself may be affected.

The paint decorating the toys may contain excessive levels of lead which can cause adverse health effects.

Call Mattel anytime to identify affected products and for more information.

1-888-299-0579
or
www.service.mattel.com

MATTEL

Discontinue use of this playset immediately

<p>SKU 275484 MFR # K3413 Go Diego Go Animal Rescue Boat</p> 	<p>SKU 275484 MFR # K3413 Go Diego Go Animal Rescue Boat</p> 
--	--

Figure 3.10: Example of scattered text in toy safety recall notice

This third example, like the first, does not clearly inform consumers about the action to take regarding the hazard and the child. Usually, this type of information is visually grouped in the main body paragraph of a toy safety recall notice. While the Diego notice

includes this information, it is located in an unusual spot. The requested action is found in a small red typeface after the phone number, website, and the Mattel brand logo.

On the other hand, Mattel provides additional helpful information that lead can cause negative health effects, in case consumers are unaware of this. The notice also includes product numbers. A problem, though, is the sentence that suggests these product numbers “may contain excessive levels of lead.” The connotation of this sentence is very different from one that reads, “contains excessive levels of lead.” If there is only a chance the toys have excessive levels of lead, as the “may” indicates, why is Mattel issuing the recall? Consumers would rightly believe Mattel should do additional testing to confirm the product numbers listed are really the toys affected. Perhaps Mattel should also have voluntarily tested the product before selling it to consumers.

Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 about risk communication discusses the importance of tailoring communication to specific audiences (Powell, 1996; Grabill & Simmons, 1998, Miller 2003). Unfortunately, no toy manufacturer can adapt toy safety recall notices to every group of people who will view the notices, given the various audiences outlined earlier in this chapter. However, small changes in current toy safety recall notices could increase the comprehension of the risk for a wider audience. For example, the language used on the toy safety recall notices can assist in presenting a clear communication of the risk. Right now, some notices use vocabulary like “aspirated,” “perforation,” or “laceration,” whose denotations could be relayed with simpler word choices. Essentially, using language that some consumers may not easily understand will put some at greater risk.

Moreover, the imperative mood is essential for toy safety recall notices to be effective. For instance, consider the difference between these sets of phrases that are similar to those which may appear on toy safety recall notices:

- A) Consumers are advised to check the toy for missing parts.
- B) Check the toy for missing parts.

- A) Consumers should remove the toy containing excessive lead levels immediately.
- B) Remove the toy containing excessive lead levels immediately.

In all cases above, the command tone helps to add a sense of urgency compared to its indicative mood counterpart. Consumers may be more likely to act on the risk if it is stated authoritatively as opposed to a request.

The three toy safety recall notice textual excerpts used in this section serve as an example for the issues typically found in most toy safety recall notices. They show that effective toy safety recall notices should use clear, simple-level vocabulary, the imperative mood, and active voice. The notices should also explicitly tell consumers not only what the hazard is but also the next steps the consumers should take regarding the hazard and the child.

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CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter presents and discusses the overall approach and rationale for this study. It also addresses some methodological issues before discussing the study's methods.

Overall Approach and Rationale

The investigation of the genre of toy safety recall notices uses a case study approach as defined by Creswell. He argues that a case study methodological strategy is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a ***bounded system*** (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving ***multiple sources of information*** (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case ***description*** and case-based themes (2007, p. 73, emphasis/bold his).

The toy safety recall notices as artifacts will serve as the case under examination. They are bound by a system of production by toy manufacturers and reception by their intended audience. As is common with case studies, my data collection is drawn from multiple sources of information: the artifacts themselves, a rhetorical analysis of the artifacts, and the audience perceptions about the notices from an online survey. For this

study, I chose to investigate only the paper notices because these are where visual design, negative news, and risk communication intersect.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) lists all recalled toys on their website, and some of the more popular toys get national attention on the evening news; however, these two channels often exclude the three areas I'm investigating. For example, the visual design is either consistently formatted for the web or non-existent on the news. The negative news is also communicated by someone other than the toy manufacturer, either a webmaster or news anchor. Moreover, these two channels are somewhat limited for a broad range of people. For example, to access the recalls on the CPSC's website, the audience needs to have access to a computer and the Internet. Immediately this qualification limits many participants from lower economic classes, who, because of their classes, may only encounter the paper versions of the toy safety recall notices.

The case study approach is best suited for studies which hope to obtain a "better understanding of the case" (Stake, 2008, p. 121). My in-depth understanding about the genre of toy safety recall notices comes from investigating how the genre is encountered, read, and used by its intended audience. Will all people in my study have similar reactions to the toy safety recall notices? What commonalities exist between their perceptions about the effectiveness of the notices? How can these perceptions create better toy safety recall notices in the future? Stake also suggests the purpose of case studies is not to comprehend some "abstract construct or generic phenomenon" or to "build theory" (2008, pp. 122-123). Moreover, he also adds that not everything about

the case can be understood. Because of this, I focused my research exclusively on understanding audience perceptions. Of course, additional research avenues exist for toy safety recall notices, and I discuss them in Chapter 6.

The most common form of data collection for a case study approach is interviews with individuals; however, documents and observations may also be considered (Stake, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this reason, I originally intended to use a survey and conduct interviews as the main means of investigation for this study. Specifically, I wanted to distribute a survey in local elementary school districts and ask the parents of these school children to complete the survey. These participants would have been a convenience sample since I could gain what I thought would be easy access. The survey also had a place for parents to indicate if they would be interested in participating in a face-to-face interview with me during which I would have asked specific open-ended questions to fully comprehend their perceptions of toy safety recall notices.

Unfortunately, I was denied access to distribute the surveys by school administrators. One school denied all access because of over-saturation of research from the university located in the same town. For another school district, I was told by a superintendant that after a few weeks of deliberation with his building principals, they decided they would not “participate in studies unless requested by the Iowa Department of Education or the Federal Department of Education” (J. Speer, personal communication, September 22, 2008).

Therefore, I needed to circumvent the road block created from not being permitted to distribute the surveys in schools. Since my research questions seek to explore audience perceptions about the genre and overall effectiveness of toy safety recall notices, I needed to solicit feedback as the main method for answering my research questions. After being denied access to the local elementary schools, I opted to move my survey into an online format. This transition was easy for the original survey component of my study that I wanted to distribute in schools. However, by putting the survey online, I lost an easy avenue to respondents with whom I was hoping to conduct face-to-face interviews. In the end, I added a second part to my survey with open-ended questions to solicit as much qualitative data as possible without conducting face-to-face interviews.

Artifact Collection

The collection of toy safety recall notices to use as artifacts for my investigation of the genre also proved to be a challenge. As mentioned earlier, the CPSC maintains a database of all toy safety recall notices. However, the electronic forms of these notices are consistently formatted for the web and do not mimic their paper counterparts.

As a result, I had to be creative in collecting the recall notices. Some I found online by doing web searches for “toy safety recall notices” or “toy recall notices” or “product recall.” Another useful source was the *Toys R Us* and *Toy R Us—Canada* (who

also works in cooperation with the CPSC) websites. They are the only retail stores that allow consumers to print the exact version of the notices found in retail stores.

The third method I used was site visits to retail stores. During the visits, I took pictures of the toy safety recall notices with my camera phone, since, as I mentioned earlier, I was not permitted to use a photocopier within the store. I then recreated the toy safety recall notices using Microsoft Word so that they mirrored the original in my photographs. I used pictures from the CPSC website for these recreated notices.

Sample Description

I wanted a large sample of participants, namely adults with different economic and education levels, as well as parents with different aged children. These participants can be considered a “maximum variety sample” (Morse, 1994, p. 229) because they come from a variety of backgrounds, and I’m scrutinizing the way they perceive toy safety recall notices to see what commonalities exist.

I solicited participants by posting electronic versions of the survey to forums that relate to parenting and child safety issues. Specifically, I posted it to the following websites’ forum pages:

- Families.com
- Parenting.com
- TodaysParent.com,

- SafetyForum.com
- rFamily.com
- CarePages.com

In addition, I also posted the survey link on Facebook and forwarded the link in an email to people I knew who have purchased toys for children. Each solicitation post read as follows:

Are you upset about the number of toys that have been recently recalled?
Do you wish you could do something about communications regarding
unsafe toys?

Well, now is your chance to have your voice heard. Complete the
following survey to help make communications about toy safety more
effective.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=MEAD_2biicgeZ2yZMfLxYShQ_3d_3d

The solicitation of online participants has some advantages as well as disadvantages. One large advantage is that I was able to collect responses from participants who were not geographically bound to the school districts I intended to use. As a result, I believe the electronic context provided a better representation of perceptions from around the country, though I cannot claim any type of random sample

or suggest that my conclusions are applicable to any contexts outside of this case study (Stake, 2008).

On the other hand, the online environment permitted only those participants with technological access to complete the survey. This fact disenfranchises many people from lower economic statuses who may not have access to technology and are already at a greater danger from not learning about the risks associated with toys, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, since I posted the survey link on parenting forums, some of the participants were probably more involved in children's lives and well-being than perhaps another group of people who do not subscribe to and participate in such forums.

Before participants began the survey, they had to meet one criterion: connection to a child (or children) younger than 12 years old. I chose this age range (0-12) since recalled toys mostly affect this group and this range fits within the range described by the CPSC for toy-related injuries (Chowdhury, 2008). Moreover, I chose not to specifically target parents, because in many instances, they are not the only people buying toys for their child. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, brothers and sisters are all suitable candidates because they could potentially purchase toys for a child and come in contact with a toy safety recall notice.

My study will not "jeopardize" any participants by "disclosing private information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 122); all participants will remain anonymous. While I did ask for some demographic data in my survey, a large portion of participants were unwilling to answer these questions. As a result, the data gathered from participants cannot be easily grouped and analyzed by demographics. However, I assume that most

of the participants in my study were adults, since toy safety recall notices do not typically target the children who use the toys. Instead, these notices typically seek to inform (mostly) adults of the potential danger associated with a toy and persuade them to remove, return, or destroy the toy.

I created the survey using the electronic survey generator called Survey Monkey. Part I of the survey asked participants 13 general questions about their beliefs and experiences concerning toy safety recall notices. This section took participants approximately 4-8 minutes to complete. Part II of the survey asked participants more in-depth questions that focused on each of the three areas that I'm investigating—visual design, negative messages, and risk communication. This section of the survey most likely took participants about 10-15 minutes to complete because of the open-ended nature of many questions. When participants finished Part II of the survey, they were brought to a final screen that asked six demographic questions. If participants did not complete Part II, the survey still directed them to the demographic questions after they finished Part I. The survey can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix B.

Finally, all survey participants in my study provided informed consent by completing the survey. They had the option of exiting the survey or skipping any question at any time if they did not feel comfortable. These instructions were outlined on the welcome letter they read prior to starting the survey. This welcome letter can be found in Appendix A. I also filed the necessary paperwork with the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board for using humans in this study and received an “exempt” classification.

Data Collection

The first part of the survey asks general questions about toy safety recall notices (e.g., have you ever come in contact with them, what do you believe are the primary and secondary purposes of the notices, what would you do if a child you knew had a toy recalled, what is the best location for viewing the notices in retail stores) to “get acquainted with a culture” (Bishop, 1999, p. 110). That is, the first part seeks to get in touch with perceptions that audiences have about toy safety recall notices. The second part of the survey asked pointed questions to explore the design of the notices, delivery of negative news, and the risks associated with the toys. Specifically, the second part of the survey was divided into each of these three categories as a way to “undertake informal coding” (Bishop, 1999, p. 110).

In the visual design section, for instance, the participants viewed three different toy safety recall notices for the same toy. However, while each toy safety recall notice included the same content, I altered the design of each one for specific purposes. For instance, one notice omitted a picture, the second included a small picture, and the third included a large picture that pointed to the hazard. The notices also had visual language variations in typeface styles, emphasis, and arrangement. Participants were only asked questions in this section about the visual design. At the end of the section, participants viewed all three modified toy safety recall notices side-by-side (see Figure 4.1 below (Kids II, 2008)). Participants were asked which toy safety recall notice they believed had the most effective design and why.

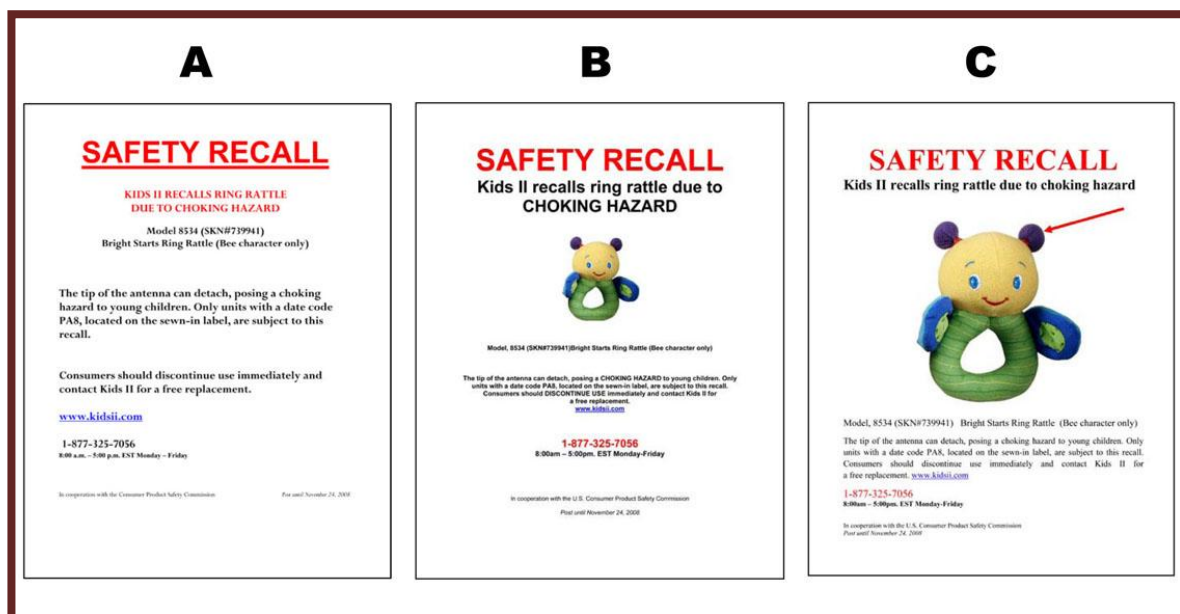


Figure 4.1: Three versions of a toy safety recall notice with modified visual designs

For the next section, a similar protocol was followed, this time focusing on negative news by modifying the verbal language used on the toy safety recall notices. The visual design, including typography and pictures remained the same. The first notice was created using all of the information found about the toy recall from the CPSC's website (Kids II, 2008). The text reads as follows:

The Little Tikes Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phone resembles a flip-phone style cell phone and has a 10-key numeric button pad and three buttons with pictures of animals. All of the buttons make a sound when pressed. It has recently been discovered that the hinge cover on the toy cell phone can detach from the phone, posing a choking hazard to young children. Consumers should take these toy phones away from young children immediately and contact Kids Station to obtain a free replacement.



Figure 4.2: Example of toy safety recall notice with modified text

The text that begins this notice serves as a buffer by providing neutral information before the negative is presented. Moreover, the first two sentences that describe the product are a type of resale on the part of the manufacturer.

The second notice participants viewed contained abbreviated information yet still preserved the passive voice that is typical of toy

safety recall notices, as seen in Figure 4.2. The text has a direct approach that immediately delivers the negative message.

The final version, while still alerting about the recall, included a full-fledged apology from the company to the consumer and implemented positive politeness strategies (i.e., “please,” active voice, and hedging). The text reads:

Kids Station would like to alert consumers that the hinge on the Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phone can detach from the toy phone, posing a choking hazard to young children. We apologize for this manufacturing oversight and are doing everything in our ability to prevent the injury of your child. If your child has the toy, take the toy phone away immediately. Please contact Kids Station at the number below to obtain a *free* replacement toy. Once again, we apologize for any inconvenience and value you as a loyal customer.

At the end of the section, participants were, once again, asked which toy safety recall notices they believed were the most and least effective based solely on the content and why.

Finally, a similar process was used for the third dimension: risk. In the third and final section, participants were shown three different toy safety recall notices for three types of hazards—lead paint, choking/intestinal perforation, and burn/fire. The lead paint risk is shown in Figure 4.3 below (Disney, 2008). For each notice, participants were asked about their reaction to the risk, how effective they believed the notice was at communicating the risk, their impression of the purpose of the notice, what they would do if they had a child who owned the toy, and how, if at all, the risk could be better communicated. After answering a series of risk-related questions for all three toy safety recall notices in this section, participants viewed all three side-by-side and were, once again, asked which they believed was the most effective and why.

Overall, this approach represented a type of artifact modification. The approach was used so that I could attempt to isolate the three theoretical components that I'm investigating—visual design, negative messages, and risk communication.

In addition to the artifact modifications, I believed that interviewing participants would provide me with a deeper qualitative

understanding of perceptions on toy safety recall notices. As Fontana and Frey argue, “interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to understand our fellow human beings” (1994, p.361). Unfortunately, the online format did not permit me to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, I believe the open-ended questions that participants encountered in Part II of my survey served as a pseudo-interview format. This structured interview approach (Bishop, 1999, p. 99;



Figure 4.3: Example of toy safety recall notice with lead paint risk

Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.363) still elicited qualitative responses from real, intended users of the toy safety recall notices.

Data Management

Once the data were collected, I coded the qualitative responses of participants, looking for themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Bishop 1999). These themes are what I use in Chapter 5 to report my results for each of the three major categories—visual design, negative messages, and risk communication. These analyzed responses of significant themes also serve as the “description” of my case (Creswell, 2007).

I used the quantitative numbers generated by the survey as descriptive statistics—the numbers served only to describe what the participants in my particular study believed. For example, I wrote statements such as “69.4% of the participants believed that the wording on the second modified toy safety recall notice was very effective.” I consulted with an Iowa State distinguished professor of statistics, and he told me not to calculate standard deviations because of the small sample size (W. Q. Meeker, personal communication, March 3, 2009). I’m only using the numbers for descriptive purposes, not as inferential statistics where findings would apply beyond my immediate data. In addition, the sample used is not a random sample, because I targeted parent and safety forums, where participants may skew the results because of their proactive nature. Finally, I’m not making any claims that the results from my study are

applicable to the entire American population. The findings highlight only the views of those participants who volunteered to take survey; all results are bound to the particular contexts of this case (Stake, 2008).

To ensure the quality of my conclusions, I checked my participants' quantitative and qualitative responses against the scholarly articles that were reviewed for this dissertation in the previous chapter. I also cross-checked to make sure that participants' responses on multiple choice questions aligned with their open-ended responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 42). For example, if 80% of people indicated one version of a recall was more effective than another, I corroborated this number by scrutinizing their qualitative responses about that particular toy's safety recall notice. I was prepared to discard any question where responses did not agree.

Researcher's Role

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, I first became interested in the genre of toy safety recall notices when I came across one that was issued for a toy my nephew owned. The experience with my nephew's toy highlighted an issue that seemed to be floating in the outer cosmos and grounded it for me in a familial setting. Moreover, I was also alarmed at the overwhelming number of toy recalls within the past two years. While I tried to remain as "objective" as possible in conducting the research, it would be naive to suggest that my own positionality did not influence how I interpreted the data.

But I outwardly acknowledge my interest in this topic, and I am genuinely interested in what my participants have to share about their perceptions of toy safety recall notices.

To this research project, I also bring years of studying rhetoric. Denzin and Lincoln suggest that every researcher communicates from within a “distinct interpretative community” (2008, p 28). Particularly, I have taken courses in visual design and professional communication, experiences that allowed me to initially suggest that safety recall notices are not effective. However, I structured my survey questions in ways that allow the participants to tell me their views, rather than imposing my own starting frame of reference.

Rhetorical Analysis of the Genre

Robin Kinross’ (1984) article “The Rhetoric of Neutrality” begins with remarks pointedly aimed at Gui Bonsiepe, who noted that a train timetable is non-rhetorical and that any revision would be just to increase its beauty. Kinross argues that everything is rhetorical in nature, showing how changing leader dots, adding color, and using different typefaces in the revised train schedule are, in fact, rhetorical choices. The point of this example is that every piece of communication is rhetorical, even something as simple as a train timetable. No communication can, by its very nature, be a-rhetorical, including toy safety recall notices. Their verbal and visual properties are created to achieve a

desired purpose (destroy, return, or remove a toy), within in a specific context, for an intended audience.

Part of my data involves a rhetorical analysis of some of the toy safety recall artifacts that I have collected. Sonja Foss suggest that rhetorical criticism is a systematic process “of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, and trying to figure out why they affect us...” and choosing “...to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present” (2009, p.1). I use her understanding of rhetorical criticism to provide authority to rhetorical analysis and the artifacts in my study—toy safety recall notices.

The rhetorical analysis discussed both verbal and visual elements of the toy safety recall notices. Many scholars have asserted the need for a balance and understanding between visual and verbal forms of communication (Hill, 2004; George, 2002; Williams, 2001). As a way to navigate through the toy safety recall notices, I primarily draw upon Kostelnick and Roberts’ (1998) 12-cell “Visual Language Matrix” to shape the visual portion of my rhetorical analysis. Their matrix considers textual, spatial and graphical elements from micro to macro levels within a given document.

In addition to the visual design of the toy safety recall notices, my rhetorical analysis also focused on language choices and how well the notices alert consumers about the risks associated with the toys.

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CHAPTER 5: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This chapter shares the results of the online survey regarding toy safety recall notices. It begins with an overview of the survey and its participants, then provides results and discussion separately for both parts of the survey.

Overview of Survey and Participants

Through the electronic soliciting of participants that was discussed in Chapter 4, I gathered 79 people who volunteered to take the first part of the survey. Part I asked general questions about the audience's experiences with and perceptions of toy safety recall notices. With the exception of two questions near the end of Part I that were free response, all of the other questions in this section were multiple choice. Some of the multiple choice questions provided an "other" write-in category.

Part II of the survey showed participants modified versions of toy safety recall notices. This section was grouped into the three main areas of my research—visual design, negative message, and risk communication. Fifty-two participants started this part of the survey; 65.8% of the original 79 participants. As is the case with most online surveys, fewer people responded to the questions as the survey continued. By the third component of Part II—risk communication—the number of participants answering questions averaged around 40. The overall trend was that people were more willing to

answer questions where they could easily choose the most effective notice from a given set of choices rather than taking the time to type in responses.

Participants who finished Part I of the survey and elected not to go on to Part II were brought to a final screen that asked demographic questions. Participants who elected to go on to Part II were also brought to this demographic screen at the end of Part II. Of the 79 participants, 51 provided their demographic data.

Among participants, 84.3% were female. This statistic is not surprising given some of the websites I targeted. Even though “parents,” “families,” and “safety” were some of the key words of the websites’ title, many of the articles were geared toward women. Sadly, these sites and other popular media, such as *Parenting* magazine, perpetuate myths that females should be in charge of child raising.

Participants’ ages ranged from 21 to 80 years old. The majority (68%) of the participants was between 21-40 years old; 32% were between 41 and 80. The most common income level of participants was between \$41-\$80K (40.5%), followed closely \$81-\$120K (33.3%), then 14.3% who earn more than \$121K and 11.9% who earn between \$0-\$40K.

Survey participants identified their relationship to a child as parents/step-parents (45.1%), aunts/uncles (23.5%), friends (9.8%) and grandparents (5.9%). The other category (15.7%) included relationships such as daycare providers, teachers, and those who wanted to define multiple relationships with children for whom they purchase toys that the categories did not permit (e.g., “parent, friend, cousin” or “parent, uncle, friend”). No sisters/brothers or guardian/foster parents completed the survey.

When asked about the ages of the children for which they purchased toys, participants responses were spread between of the categories supplied on the survey: 0-1 years old (41.2%), 2-3 years old (64.7%), 4-5 years old (51.0%), 6-8 years old (49%), and 9-12 years old (33.3%). Obviously, 2-3 years old had the highest response count. For this question, the total percentages are greater than 100% because participants could choose more than one answer.

Because a significant number of participants did not provide demographic data, I cannot group responses based on demographics to make inferences. For example, I cannot make conclusions that aunts/uncles who have a household income between \$41-\$80K are more likely to perceive certain elements about toy safety recall notices similarly. Nonetheless, the people who did provide their demographic information serve as a snapshot of who answered the survey. Overall, with the exception of gender, the participants who supplied demographic data were varied in their age, household income, and the ages of children for whom they typically purchased toys.

Results—Part I

Part I attempted to survey the terrain of toy safety recall notices and audience perceptions about them by asking general questions (i.e., “Have you ever seen a toy safety recall notices?” or “What do you see as the purpose of the notices?”). Of the people who took the survey, 84.8% had seen a toy safety recall notice. The most

prominent location where they came in contact with a recall notice (see Table 5.1) was in a retail store (66.7%), followed by the internet (40.9%), television (33.3%), and newspapers (18.2%). Other (16.7%) places where participants came in contact with toy safety recall notices included pediatricians' offices, magazines for parents, or direct notification from the toy company. The total percentage is greater than 100% because participants could choose more than one answer for this question.

Table 5.1: Contact with toy safety recall notices

Q: How did you come in contact with toy safety recall notices?	
Newspaper	18.2%
Television	33.3%
Internet	40.9%
Retail Store	66.7%
Other (please specify)	16.7%

Though a large percentage of the participants have encountered toy safety recall notices, 53.2% of participants noted that they never check for new recalls. On the other hand, 18.2% indicated they check monthly. All other categories—daily,

weekly, yearly—for checking recalls accounted for less than 4% each. The “other” option comprised of 20.8% of responses. Responses in this group included sporadically, when purchasing a toy, or when alerts are posted on forums or email listservs.

When asked how many toys they had purchased had been recalled, 31.6% marked “none,” while 26.3% “did not know.” Other participants indicated that one or two of the toys they purchased had been recalled (22.4%), 3-4 (9.2%), and 5-6 (6.6%). The “other” category accounted for 3.9%.

Table 5.2: Most likely action on recalled toy

Q: If a child you know had a toy recalled, what would you MOST likely do?	
Keep toy	0.0%
Destroy toy	18.4%
Take toy away from child	26.3%
Return toy to store	42.1%
Other (please specify)	13.2%

23.7% took action on one or two toys, and 10.5% took action on five or six toys. The “other” category again accounted for 3.9%.

When participants were asked what they would be most likely to do if they knew a child who had a toy that was recalled (see Table 5.2), 42.1% indicated they would return the toy to the store, followed by 26.3% who would take the toy away from child, then 18.4% who would destroy the toy. No one (0.0%) would keep the toy. The “other” category (13.2%) indicated they would make a decision based on the seriousness of the recall or send the product back to the manufacturer.

Table 5.3: Least likely action on recalled toy

Q: If a child you know had a toy recalled, what would you LEAST likely do?	
Keep toy	85.5%
Destroy toy	2.6%
Take toy away from child	0.0%
Return toy to store	5.3%
Other (please specify)	6.6%

In conjunction with the last question, participants were also asked how many toys they had removed, returned, or destroyed as the result of a toy safety recall. The largest group (56.6%) indicated that no action was taken on any recalled toys, while

On the other hand, when consumers were asked what they would be least likely to do if they knew a child who had a toy that was recalled (see Table 5.3), 85.5% were least likely to keep the toy, followed

by 5.3% who would return the toy, and 2.6% who would destroy the toy. No one (0.0%) indicated they would be least likely to take the toy away from the child. The “other” category (6.6%) indicated the thing they would be least likely to do would depend on the nature of the recall.

Table 5.4: Factor most likely to prompt return

Q: If a child you know had a toy recalled, what factor would MOST likely prompt you to RETURN the toy?	
Price	24.3%
Hazard associated with toy	71.6%
Child's liking for the toy	1.4%
Child's age	0.0%
Other (please specify)	2.7%

(71.6%). The price of the toy was second (24.3%), followed by the child's liking for the toy (1.4%). Participants in the “other” category said they would discard the toy (2.7%) instead of returning it.

Table 5.5: Factor most likely to keep toy

Q: If a child you know had a toy recalled, what factor would MOST likely prompt you to KEEP the toy?	
Price	4.1%
Hazard associated with toy	20.5%
Child's liking for the toy	16.4%
Child's age	26.0%
Other (please specify)	32.9%

When asked to decide on the factor that would most likely prompt them to return a toy if they knew a child who owned a recalled toy (see Table 5.4), participants indicated that the hazard associated with the toy would be the reason for the return

Participants indicated that the factor most likely to prompt them to keep a recalled toy (see Table 5.5) was the child's age (26.0%), the hazard associated with the toy (20.5%), and child's liking for the toy (16.4%). The “other” group had the biggest

percentage (32.9%). For this write-in section, participants stated they would never keep a recalled toy.

Table 5.6: Primary purpose beliefs

Q: What do you believe are the secondary purposes of toy safety recall notices? (Check all that apply)	
To promote the toy manufacturer	9.5%
To protect children	43.2%
To reduce legal action	56.8%
To remove from store shelf	24.3%
Other (please specify)	0.0%

was to reduce legal action. Only 1.4% indicated the primary purpose was to remove the item from the store shelf, while 0.0% indicated the purpose was to promote the manufacturer. In terms of secondary purposes (see Table 5.7), the largest two categories from the primary purpose questions reversed. Now, 56.8% believed the secondary

Table 5.7: Secondary purpose beliefs

Q: What do you believe is the primary purpose of a toy safety recall notice?	
To promote the toy manufacturer	0.0%
To protect children	52.7%
To reduce legal action	45.9%
To remove from store shelf	1.4%
Other (please specify)	0.0%

Participants were also queried about their perceptions of the primary and secondary purposes of toy safety recall notices (see Table 5.6). Two responses received a majority of all responses; 52.7% believed the primary purpose was to protect children, while 45.9% suggested the primary purpose

purpose of a toy safety recall notice was to reduce legal action, while 43.2% indicated it was to protect children. For this question, though, the participants could chose more than one answer, so other categories were also significant. To remove an item from a store shelf

received 24.3% of responses, while 9.5% believed a secondary purpose was to promote a manufacturer.

The last two questions were open-ended where the audience had to type in feedback. The first of these questions asked participants about the best place to view toy safety recall notices in retail stores and why they chose that location. Most respondents provided a suggestion but failed to include a reason. The most common responses were at customer service, not at customer service, the toy department, not in the toy department, front windows, the entrance to the store, and the cashiers/checkout counters.

The second question asked participants about their experiences with a recall process. Twenty-six participants chose to provide details of their various recall experiences. For some participants, the recall process was pleasant. One participant wrote, “The Thomas the Train² (RC2) recalls were done well. It did take a long time to get the replacement toys, but the free product was relatively quick in coming.” (Consumers who participated in the recall received a free gift in addition to a

² Interesting fact about the Thomas the Train recalls: After the recalls for lead paint in June 2007, the manufacturer sent a free bonus product in addition to a new replacement toys. Ironically, only a few months later in September 2007, the customers who received the “Toad” vehicle as their free gift learned that this accessory was now being recalled for containing excessive levels of lead! (RC2 Corporation, personal communication, October 1, 2007)

replacement product.) Another participant stated, “surprisingly, very pleasant. Instructions on replacing the merchandise were simple and the process efficient.”

A few respondents noted how they took the toy back to the store instead of sending for a replacement, and the store refunded the toy with no questions. One person wrote, “I returned the toy to the store where purchased; the store was more than happy to assist.” On the other hand, others participants wrote that having to use a mailer slowed down the process of receiving a replacement toy. One participant stated, “annoying. I had to mail back the toy and then was sent a check to reimburse.” Another noted, “I sent two of them [Safety First Teething Rings] back. It cost me about ten dollars for shipping and then got two crappy toys back. I was not impressed!” Finally, some noted they just destroyed the toy instead of going through the recall process. A respondent stated, “The process was too involved, so I just destroyed the toy. Polly Pockets were recalled based on year and the pieces are so tiny you couldn’t find the serial number to see if the toy was a recall or not.”

Discussion

Overall, the first part of the survey provided some interesting insights into how real audiences perceive toy safety recall notices and what they most likely will do in toy recall situations.

Many participants (84.8%) who took the survey have seen toy safety recall notices. However, my survey sample may have skewed the results. Proactive parents were probably more likely to take part in the survey which could indicate why so many people have seen the notices. On the other hand, over half of the participants who took the survey never check for toy safety recall notices. This lack of a proactive approach could put children at risk.

Retail stores were the most likely place that participants have come in contact with a toy safety recall notice. Responders also viewed the notices on the internet and television. Typically, only the large-quantity recalls gain the attention of television broadcasts. And as I've mentioned before, internet channels may disenfranchise some audiences, particularly those from lower economic classes.

Beliefs about the primary purposes of toy safety recall notices varied only slightly between protecting children and reducing legal action. The fact that so many people perceived reducing legal action as a major or secondary purpose aligns with society's general overall distrust of businesses and their ethical practices.

The hazard associated with a toy is the number one reason that would prompt people to return a toy. I was also struck that the largest percentage of responses for keeping a recalled toy was comprised of participants who typed in that they would never keep a recalled toy. For instance, one participant stated, "I wouldn't keep a recalled toy. My children's safety is worth more than their unhappiness." Another person noted, "I wouldn't keep it [the toy] under any circumstances." However, the other interesting finding of this question is that the child's age comprised the second highest percentage.

Apparently, participants believed that once children reach a certain age, the hazards associated with a toy are not as paramount, a finding that aligns with some studies (Sjoberg, 2001; Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 2005) which found that people respond to risk based on their perception of it.

The mix of responses written in for the best location of toy safety recall notices in retail stores helped to highlight the complex physical contexts associated with the notices. For instance, some respondents suggested that customer service would be the best spot, while others argued that customer service would not be good. One person wrote, “Not everyone goes to the customer service desk where they are usually posted.” The same general counter-argument theme was represented by other locations such as the toy department. One consumer stated, “I saw the Thomas the Train recall notice displayed with the toys, which was fine in that case because we often look at them. But if it is a game or something that you would not be buying the same of, then you might not see the notice.” Echoing the same sentiments, another responder wrote, “If placed by toys, the notice cannot be seen unless you go to the toy section.” Some respondents argued customer service or the toy aisle would be good locations, others argued the opposite, like the respondents above, that unless customers have a purpose to go to this particular location/department, they will not see the notices.

The one place that didn’t have a counterargument was at the cash registers/checkout counters. However, I question the feasibility of hanging multiple toy safety recall notices at checkout counters, particularly at large big-box chains. Much of the space at these stores is already filled with small, last minute add-on products such as

candy or batteries. There might not be room to post multiple toy safety recall notices. If consumers enter a store and don't actually purchase anything, there is a chance that they could miss the toy safety recall notices if they're posted at the cash registers.

Some participants also suggested the front door or vestibule area of a store would be a good location. They suggested this location because consumers "do not have to seek them out" and because they "would see them right away." However, the stores would most definitely have to consider the ethos they would be projecting if consumers immediately encounter faulty products sold at that particular store. Of course, if they were federally mandated to place the notices on store windows, there wouldn't be much of a counterargument. Other respondents made suggestions such as creating a recall booth or posting notices on store bulletin boards that consumers immediately come upon as they enter a store. A location mentioned for these display areas would be by the shopping carts.

Overall, the data supplied by participants made one thing clear: there probably is not one central location where stores should post these notices. However, multiple locations—store windows or vestibule area, bulletin boards, toy departments, customer service, and checkout counters—would most likely increase the chances of the widest number of consumers encountering the toy safety recall notices.

The various experiences of those who had gone through a recall process link to the risk communication theory of Sjöberg (2000), who argues that people will act based on their perception of risk. Some participants acted on the recall, getting in touch with the company or returning the product to the retail store. Some participants discussed an

easy process, while others noted how the wait time was long. And even though the question asked participants to talk about their experience with the recall process, some noted how they chose not to return to the toy but just discarded it. A few noted that price was a factor; one participant stated, “items were not expensive enough to justify the ‘hassle’ of returning.”

Others, however, took the risk associated with the toy into their own hands, a phenomenon that Sjoberg (2000) would dub as “risk denial.” For example, one consumer noted that “Maganetix has been recalled, but my boys have been building with them for years and never had a problem. I just make certain they are put away.” This parent obviously believes that he/she has control over the hazard associated with the toy. Another similar response is the participant who, instead of returning a toy, said, “I watched the child carefully when he played with the toy.” Once again, people responded based on their perception of risk.

Results—Part II

Part II of the survey presented participants with modified versions of toy safety recall notices. The participants were given the opportunity to decide on which versions they liked best and also the chance to submit responses for their reasons. Throughout this section of the survey, participants viewed nine toy safety recall notices in total, with

three focusing on each area of my study—visual design, negative message, and risk communication. I share the results for each section below.

Visual Design

In this section of the survey, participants looked at three modified versions of the same toy safety recall notice. For the first instance, they viewed the toy safety recall notice shown in Figure 5.1 on the right (Kids II, 2008).

Overall, the majority of people believed that the design of this toy safety recall notice was “somewhat ineffective” (45.5%), followed by “very ineffective” (27.3%) and “somewhat effective” (22.7%). Reasons provided as to why this particular notice was “somewhat ineffective” included the fact that there was no picture, the name of

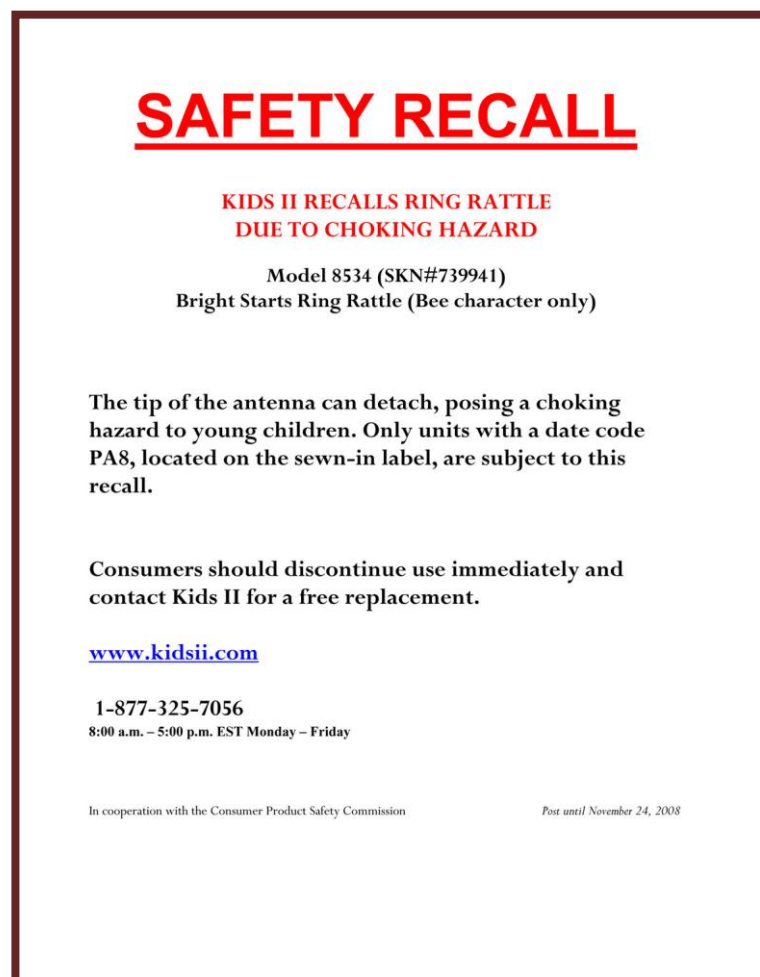


Figure 5.1: Example of first modified visual design

the toy was in small type, and the hazard blended in with the red from the notice's title. A participant stated one main hindrance was "the lack of photos to identify the toy. It's easier to recognize the toy by sight, rather than by name." Along the same idea, someone mentioned, "Most consumers, I know, do not know the model number and date code for their children's toys. A lack of picture makes it less likely for the consumer to identify the hazardous toy." Concerned about the text used to identify the toy, another respondent said, "the name of the toy was in smaller print and my eyes scanned over it and had to go searching for it."

However, participants were also asked if any parts of the design were effective. Some responses included the strong title in red, small paragraph size, and plenty of white space. The majority of people looked at the title in big red letters first because, as many participants suggested, it "stands out from the page." One person commented that "the large red type indicated the content of the message" was most effective because "people's eyes are drawn to it." Only two participants stated that they looked at the hazard first.

The second toy safety recall notice modification used is shown in Figure 5.2. Overall, the majority of people believed that the design of this toy safety recall notice was "somewhat effective" (46.5%), followed by "very effective" (41.9%) and "somewhat ineffective" (11.6%). No one who completed the survey believed that this toy safety recall notice was "very ineffective." Some of the reasons provided as to why this particular notice was "somewhat effective" included the picture of the toy and the large red letters to catch attention. The majority of the people looked at the picture first

because they thought it was the most prominent feature of the notice. One person wrote that the picture “makes it easy for consumers to recognize and identify if their children have that toy.”

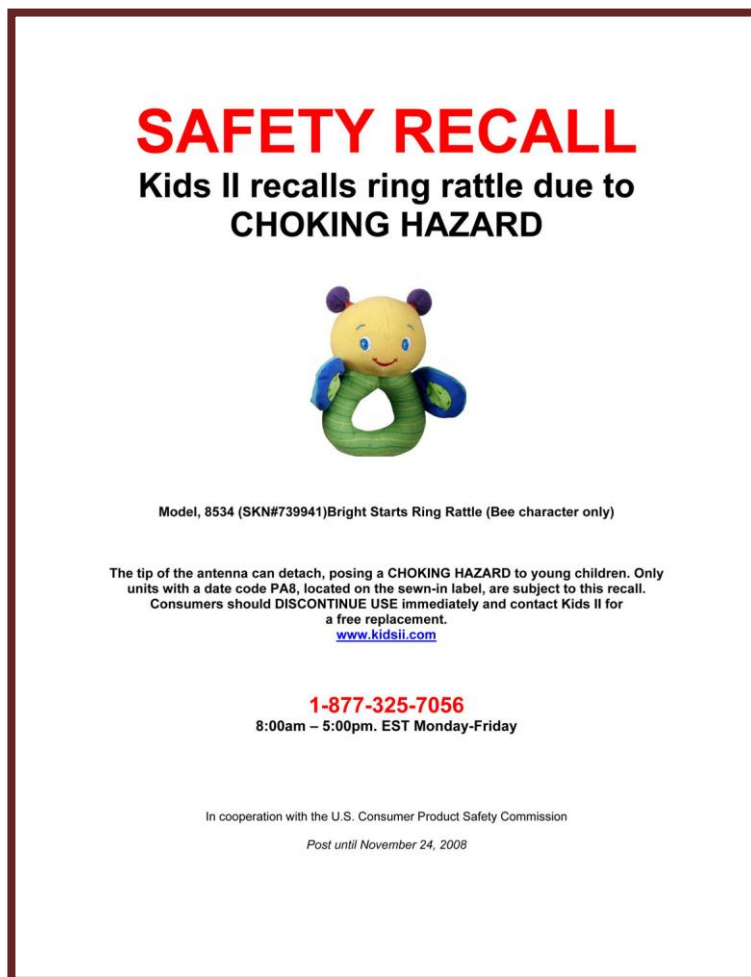


Figure 5.2: Example of second modified visual design

The parts of the design specified as ineffective included the small typeface size, specifically the text describing how choking could occur, and the center alignment of the text. One person said “the description is too small. No one would take the time to read this or in some cases would be unable to read it.” Another participant expressed “the detailed reason for the choking hazard should be

larger so more people will read it.” In addition, another person commented about the design, stating that “it does not convey the needed information quickly enough for a parent.”

For the third and final modified toy safety recall notice that the participants viewed, shown in Figure 5.3, the majority of people believed that the design was “very effective” (72.3%). This figure is much higher than corresponding figures of the previous two toy safety recall notices. In addition, 21.3% of the participants believed this notice was also “somewhat effective.” Only a small percent of respondents (6.4%) thought the toy safety recall notice was “somewhat ineffective.” No one believed that this toy safety recall notice was “very ineffective.”

Some of the reasons provided as to why this particular notice was “very effective” included the larger picture, the arrow pointing to

the hazard, and large red letters across the top. For

example, one consumer noted that the most effective point of this recall notice is “the picture with the red arrow pointing to the exact part of the toy that poses the safety hazard because it reinforces the written description of the product flaw and helps



Figure 5.3: Example of third modified visual design

consumers identify both the toy and the choking hazard.” While many people noticed the arrow first, a large number of people also noted they looked at the picture first.

Participants were also asked if any parts of the design were ineffective. Some of their responses included things such as the typeface of the description was too small, the choking hazard phrase could be even larger, and the phone number should be centered. One person stated that “the headline is too lengthy—cut the manufacturer. The problem is buried in the sentence.” Although these concerns focus more on textual issues, the observations help to demonstrate the interconnectedness of visual and verbal practices in toy safety recall notices. Overall, a large portion of written responses for the ineffective parts of this notice included “N/A” or “none.”

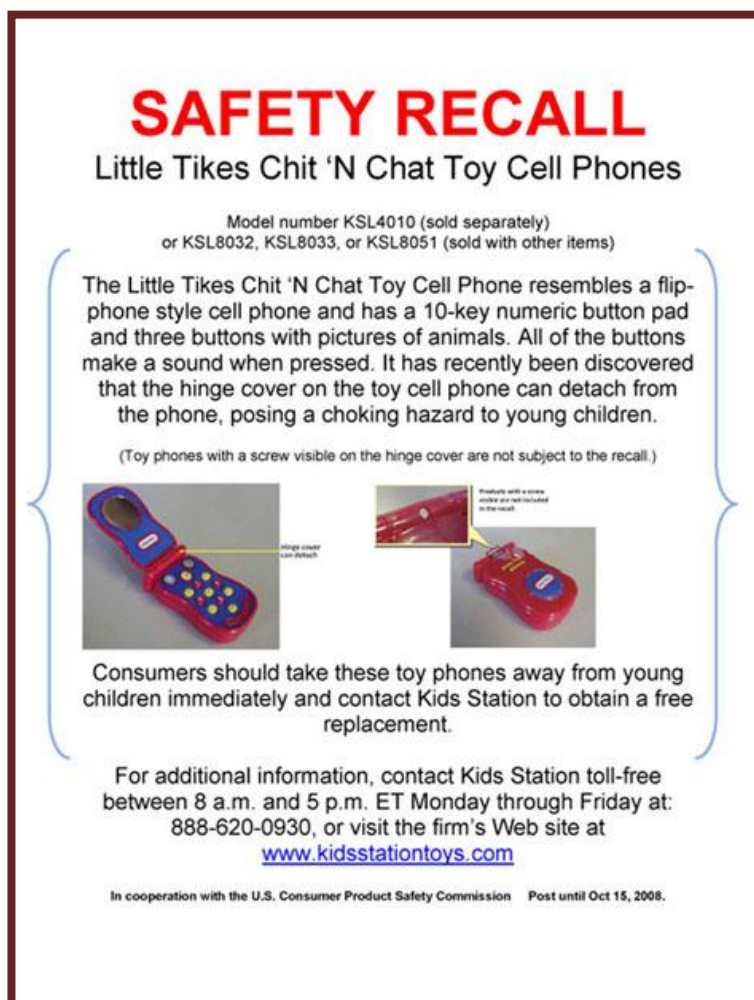
In the final open-ended question for this particular section of the survey, participants were asked which design they believed was the most effective and why. The majority of people believed that the third notice they viewed was the most effective. One participant stated that the third notice was “easy to read and understand; the information is laid out in a way that makes the message very clear.” Overall, reasons for choosing the third one were because the visual was the largest and grabbed their attention, the arrow helped to highlight the danger, and they immediately understood just by looking at the toy safety recall notice whether they were affected. While not receiving as many comments, the second notice also got some attention as the most effective. People who chose the second notice commented on the centered text and the larger-sized typeface used for the hazard. One person indicated that the second notice is

the most effective because the “choking hazard is also in all caps and boldface. Helps emphasize reason for recall.”

Negative Messages

Again, participants were shown three different modified toy safety recall notices. This time they answered a series of questions about the text on the notices.

The first notice the participants viewed is pictured in Figure 5.4. Overall, the



majority of people perceived that the wording of this toy safety recall notice to be “somewhat effective” (46.2%), followed by “very effective” (32.7%), and “somewhat ineffective” (17.3%). Only a small portion (3.8%) believed this notice was “very ineffective.” Some of the phrases/sentences that the audiences believed were effective in this particular

Figure 5.4: Example of first modified text

notice included “choking hazard,” “the hinge cover can detach,” and the recommendation to “take the toy away from young children immediately.”

On the other hand, some of the items that people believed were ineffective were the small captions, the sentence that directs consumers to contact the toy manufacturer, and the description of the phone’s functions, particularly the buttons making sound. Many participants noted that the picture was enough. For example, someone stated, “The sentences describing the phone are ineffectual because they are unnecessary. There

is a picture of the phone in which all of the previously mentioned features can be clearly seen and are even labeled. The extra information only serves to make the notice cluttered and deter people from reading it.” Another participant made the observation that “consumers are bulletin blind. So, by minimizing the text to the most



Figure 5.5: Example of second modified text

necessary text, people are more likely to recognize the notice and take it seriously.”

The second toy safety recall notice viewed by participants included an abbreviated amount of text and is shown in Figure 5.5. A majority of participants reacted positively to the text in this notice with 71.4% of them suggesting the wording of this toy safety recall notice was “very effective.” Another 24.5% believed that the wording here was “somewhat effective,” while only 6.1% believed the wording was “somewhat ineffective. No one believed the wording on this notice was “very ineffective.”

The audience believed that the text on this particular notice was effective because it was condensed and focused on exactly what the consumer needed to know. One participant stated that “this recall is concise and to the point hitting the key points without extra words. The photo gives a clear image of toy without the added description.” Another person said “This text is effective because it gets straight to the point about the hazard posed by the phone.” Because the hazard was upfront and not buried in a paragraph of text, some participants also noted how the danger overall seemed more “serious” than in the first noticed they viewed.

However, there were a few phrases/sentences that people believed were ineffective. For example, some consumers wanted a definition of exactly who was at risk because “young children,” as the notice indicated, was too vague. One person asked, “Who decides what constitutes young?” Although a minority, some participants noted that they would have liked a fuller description of the toy and felt like that was missing

from this second notice. A participant wrote, “the part about the hinge cover detaching doesn’t really explain the hazard.”

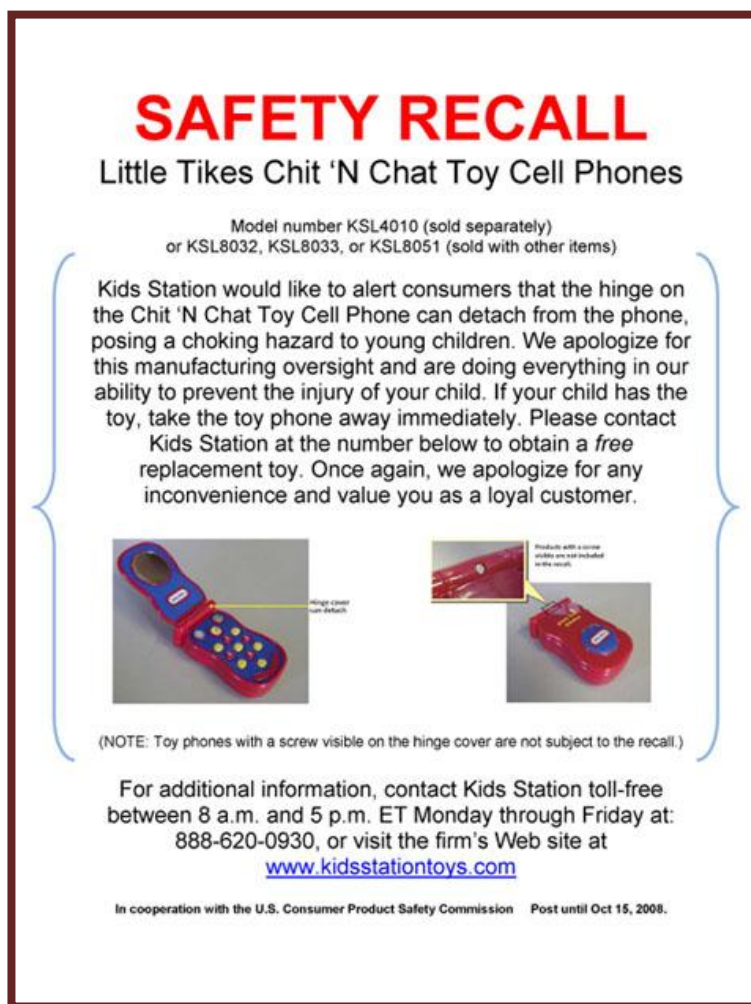


Figure 5.6: Example of third modified text

Finally, participants provided responses to a third modified toy safety recall notice. This notice, shown in Figure 5.6, used active voice and offered an apology. Overall, 47.9% of the participants rated this as “somewhat effective.” This percentage is just a little more than the combined beliefs of those who felt the notice was “somewhat ineffective” (20.8%) and “very ineffective” (16.7%). Those who believed

this notice was “very effective” accounted for 14.6%.

As was true with the other two notices they viewed, participants were happy that the text talked about the hazard and what the consumers should do if they owned the toy. In addition, they also liked how the notice specifically stated what they would receive as consumers—a free replacement. Four participants suggested the apology

made this notice effective. One person commented on the tone. For instance, the participant stated, “I like the more personal tone. It makes the company sound more favorable—like this is something they want to do for the safety of the children, not something they have to do by law.”

But overall, participants believed this toy safety recall notice contained too much text. The majority of participants also noted that the apology was “worthless,” “smarmy,” and “insincere.” One person stated that the apology sounds “like something their attorneys told them to say to limit liability.” In addition, consumers were also skeptical about the repeated apology. One participant stated that “customers do not need to hear the apology from the manufacturer two times in one recall notice.” Some participants suggested that the language used on this notice made the “alert not forceful enough” and that it “detracts from the immediacy of the risk.” Finally, the free phone replacement also made some audiences skeptical.

In the second to last question for the negative message section, participants were asked which toy safety recall notice was most and least effective. The majority of participants in open-ended responses commented that the second notice was most effective. They liked this notice’s conciseness and believed it was the most direct. For instance, one participant stated, “Consumers are in a hurry and need something quick to comprehend. If it’s too long they won’t bother to read it at all.” Another participant noted that “the average consumer is more likely to scan a notice for information than read through paragraphs of information.” The least effective toy safety recall notice for

most participants was the third one. For similar reasons mentioned above, most did not like the apology, length, “unnecessary” information, or tone.

Finally, participants were also asked in an open-ended question what they would do based on their reading of this toy safety recall notice. Participants had various responses, which were mostly evenly divided. Some wrote that they would take the toy away from the child; others would return the toy for a new one; still others would throw the toy away. One participant stated “since the toy looks relatively inexpensive, if the child is relatively unattached to the toy, I would take the toy away and get rid of it. If the child was especially attached to the toy or it was expensive, I would contact the company for a replacement.” In addition, some participants mentioned that their actions would depend on the child’s age.

Risk Communication

In the risk communication section of the survey, participants were asked about their perceptions of risk based on toy safety recall notices. They viewed three notices, each with a different toy hazard—lead paint, magnets, and burn/fire. For each toy safety recall notice viewed, participants were asked about their first reaction to the notice, what risk the notice conveyed to them, how effective the notice was at communicating the risk associated with the toy, the purpose of the notice, what they would do if they knew a child who owned this toy, and their suggestions on how the risk could be better communicated.

For the toy safety recall notice whose hazard was lead paint exposure (Figure 5.7; Disney, 2008), initial responses to the notice varied. Some participants were outraged by the continued use of lead paint in toys. One participant noted “I want to swear because of the lead paint!” while another stated “How could they let this happen in the first place?”

Another indicated that

he/she was “disgusted that another toy has lead paint.” Others questioned whether a child they knew owned this toy. Some said their initial response was to take the toy away from a child, while others would return it to the store. Still others expressed disgust toward Disney, the maker of this particular toy. For example, one person stated, “Disney is the devil and they should know better,” while another asked, “Why is almighty Disney allowing lead in its toys?”



Figure 5.7: Example of toy recall for lead paint risk

When asked about the risk this particular toy safety recall notice conveyed, participants wrote responses to the open-ended question that ranged from low, moderate, high, and very high levels of concern. For instance, one person stated that the risk “does not seem that important,” while another participant stated it has “severe risk since many of the children I know still like to put toys in their mouth.” Other participants noted that there was not actually “a risk identified. It just states that a lead violation occurred.”

Participants believed, however, that this toy safety recall notice was “very effective” (43.2%) at alerting them about the risk associated with the toy, followed by “somewhat effective,” (34.1%). On the other hand, 15.9% of the respondents suggested the notice was “somewhat ineffective,” while 6.8% believed the notice was “very ineffective.”

In terms of the purposes for this particular recall notice, participants believed the primary goals were to inform consumers that lead paint was used in this toy, to protect children from the hazard, and to reduce legal liability. One person stated that the purpose was “to notify parents to take the specified toy away from their child.” Another participant noted that the main goal was to reduce legal action because “the [notice] doesn’t mention anything about the health risks to your children when exposed to higher levels of lead.”

Responses varied on the action participants would take if they knew a child who owned this toy. The majority of participants suggested they would take the toy away and/or return it. A participant stated, “I would take the toy away and return it to the

Disney store.” However, a fair share also indicated they would just destroy it. For example, one participant wrote “I would throw the wand away, and probably write an angry email to Disney.” A few indicated they would do nothing.

Participants also provided suggestions on how the risk might be better communicated. Many thought that bold lettering should be used to highlight the words “lead paint” so that a viewer would immediately know the danger without having to read the text. Another suggestion echoed by many was that there could be a short explanation about the dangers of ingesting lead paint. For example, one participant stated the notice should “explain why lead paint is dangerous. Not all people realize why it’s dangerous.” The toy safety recall notice could also indicate the amount of lead paint; some participants noted that “excessive” doesn’t say a lot. The picture could also be larger and clearer. Moreover, some users wanted to see the product pictured without its packaging, since, if the toy is in their house, it most likely will no longer be in the original package.

Figure 5.8 displays the next toy safety recall notice that participants examined (Mega, 2008). Here again, their initial responses to the notice were varied. Some participants questioned whether a child they knew owned this toy. Others noted that this toy posed a much more serious threat than did the lead exposure. A few mentioned they were not previously aware of the dangers from magnets. Some participants said their initial response would be to take the toy away from a child, while others would return it.

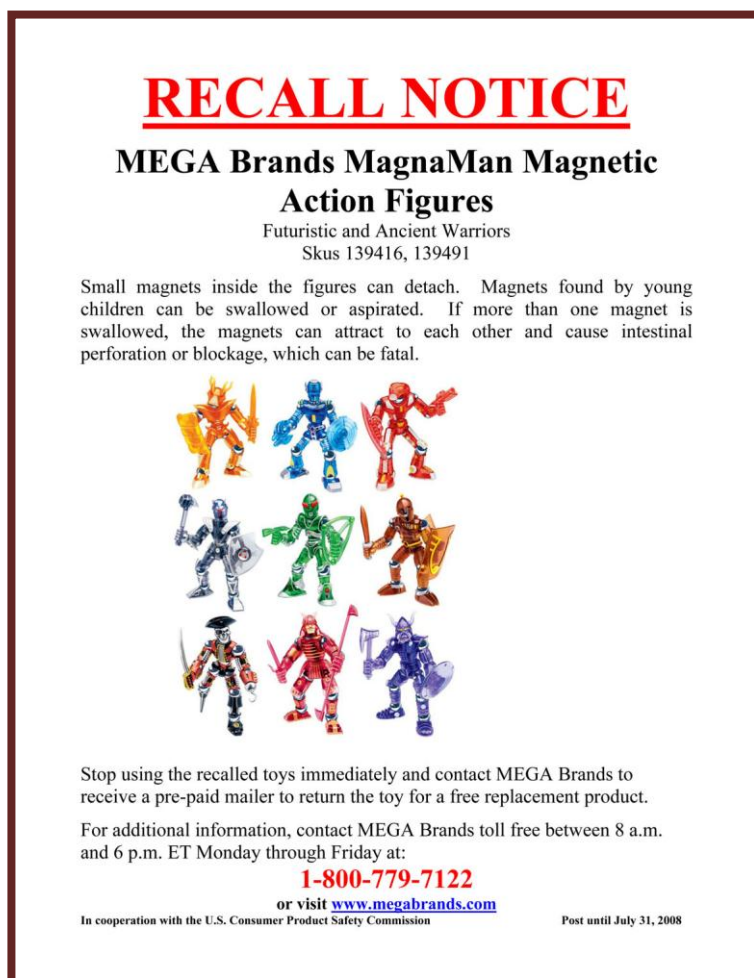


Figure 5.8: Example of toy recall for intestinal blockage risk

When asked about the risk this particular toy safety recall notice conveyed, participants noted the hazards of swallowing magnets. Many participants also suggested that death was the greatest risk outlined by the notice.

Overall, participants believed that this toy safety recall notice was, again, “very effective” (48.8%) at alerting

them about the risk associated with the toy. Other

respondents thought the notice was “somewhat effective,” (44.2%), while others believed it to be “somewhat ineffective” (2.3%). Only 4.7% believed the notice to be “very ineffective.”

In terms of the purposes for this particular recall notice, participants believed the primary goals were to protect children from the hazard. While some consumers mentioned that the major purpose was to reduce legal liability, this response was given

less often than it was for the lead paint hazard. Other purposes include informing about the risk and getting the toy removed.

The majority of participants said they would take the toy away and/or throw it away if they knew a child who owned it. Some participants said their actions depend upon the child's age. However, unlike the responses about the toy containing lead paint, a smaller number of participants said they would return the toy, perhaps because of the hassle involved to get the replacement toy. One participant stated that "having to contact the company for a prepaid mailer and then sending in the toys is a much more complicated process than just returning to the store for a refund as in the Tinker Bell Wand Safety Recall."

Some of the suggestions for how the risk could be better communicated included using a more urgent tone and showing a picture of a child choking. One participant stated, "I feel the wording should be bolder and have a more urgent message." Another said, "get to the seriousness of the problem in the first part of the sentence." The most common suggestion was to make some words bolder or colored in red, especially the word "fatal." Other users were concerned about the language. One participant suggested "using less technical jargon (aspirated, intestinal perforation)."

Finally, the participants viewed one last toy safety recall notice, shown in Figure 5.9 (Dumar, 2008). Initial responses varied. Some participants thought the manufacturer was "negligent" that the product didn't go through more testing before it was marketed. Others noted their first reaction to this toy safety recall notice was "yikes!" A few others indicated they were annoyed at the "retrofit" that is mentioned on the notice. For

instance, one participant stated, “Aw, geez, I have to get a retrofit, meaning I have to fix their mistake.”

When asked about the risk this particular toy safety recall notice conveyed, participants noted that fire and burns were serious. Overall, there was agreement that this ride-on car was a dangerous item. Some participants noted that the injury with this toy results from a manufacturing defect, whereas with the previous two toys, the risk was initiated by the child.



Figure 5.9: Example of toy recall for burn/fire risk

Moreover, unlike the previous two toy safety recall notices, the majority of participants believed that this toy safety recall notice was only “somewhat effective” (53.7%) at alerting them about the risk associated with the toy. The next highest category was “very effective” with 34.1% of responses, followed by 9.8% of the respondents choosing “somewhat ineffective,” while 2.4% believed the notice to be “very ineffective.”

In terms of the purposes for this particular recall notice, participants responded with many of the same goals from the other two toys—to inform about the danger, to protect children from the hazard, to reduce legal liabilities. One respondent stated the purpose was to “protect the company from legal action (and child from injury).” In addition, another purpose that participants suggested for this toy safety recall notice was for consumers to get the part to fix the potential danger. One person said the purpose of the notice is to “fix the toy to make it safe for a child.”

As with the other two notices, many participants suggested they would take the toy away. However, a greater number indicated they would send for the replacement kit to fix the toy instead of destroying it like with the previous two toys. One person stated they would “take it away until a retrofit replacement could be installed.” Many also articulated their desire to express their anger to the toy manufacturer. The child’s age was not mentioned as a factor as it had been for the previous two toys, probably because only a narrow age range would use the toy car.

Participants offered numerous written responses for how the risk on this toy safety recall notice could be better communicated. For instance, some participants wanted to see flames or some sort of symbol for a fire hazard. Others indicated the text that outlined the hazard could use more emphasis, especially “fire” and “burn.” In addition, some participants believed the risk could be better communicated if the notice showed a picture of the wires that could cause the short circuit. One person wrote, “Maybe a picture of the car on fire? Or some fire symbol?”

Finally, participants were again shown the three notices side-by-side and asked which one they believed was the most effective and why. Overall, the responses indicated that a majority of participants believed that the second toy safety recall notice with the magnets was most effective. However, the reasons provided by the participants who selected this notice (states/describes the hazard, identifies what consumers should do, uses a phone number) were not significantly different from the reasons offered by participants who selected the first or third recall notice. There were also a handful of participants who suggested that none of the notices were more effective than the other, making statements like “all three are effective” or “no difference in my opinion.”

Discussion—Part II

This discussion outlines major findings and areas of interest related to Part II of the survey. I again break this section into the three components—visual design, negative messages, risk communication—under investigating.

However, I should point out that this discussion, to some extent, revolves around the attempt to artificially separate the three areas and study them individually. While I was able to obtain information about each, many of the participants’ responses were not limited to one area. For example, while evaluating visual design, many people also noted how a certain design element affects how well the risk is communicated. When writing about risk, some mentioned how the text did not do a good job of

delivering the negative news. I believe this crossover shows how inextricably linked these areas of research are in relation to toy safety recall notices.

Visual Design

Participants of the study noted overwhelmingly they wanted to see a picture with the first of three toy safety recall notices they viewed. For instance, one participant said, “a picture would be helpful so that you could quickly see if you have the toy. Once the packaging is gone, it can be hard to tell the official name of the toy.” The finding that many people wanted a picture was no surprise. Shriver (1997) found that visuals often lead to audience perceptions and comprehension of documents.

The participants also noted that using pictures actually served as a processing tool for the safety recall notice. People who view the notices can quickly look at the picture, the title, and then immediately determine if they own the toy. One participant indicated that the picture was paramount, “because if you recognize the toy, the danger feels more real, and you feel it’s more important to read further.” Other respondents noted they would not even bother looking at a toy safety recall notice if there was no picture because it would be too difficult to identify the toy. So as the participants indicated, the pictures were helpful and typically the first piece of design that they examined. This finding concurred with Gerristen, Van Meurs, and Diepstraten (2001), whose participants also advocated that pictures make recall messages more clear.

Participants also responded favorably to the arrow used in the third notice. One person stated that the arrow was “pointing to the exact part of the toy that poses the safety hazard...it reinforces the written description of the product flaw and helps consumers identify both the toy and the choking hazard.” Overall, there was a general consensus from most participants that the arrow helped to locate the hazard immediately and saved time.

For all of the three notices relating to visual design, participants mentioned that the strong red title was effective. It immediately captured their attention and they could identify the topic of the document. They had these reactions because of the strong figure-ground contrast, discussed in Chapter 4 (Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998) of the title.

However, no one indicated that the serifs added or detracted from the title, an obvious result from the survey design. While participants might not have used these specific terms, I hoped that some of the audience would have indicated they liked the heading of one notice over the other or made a comment about the underline. But no one made any type of distinction. Therefore, this typeface finding did not confirm or refute scholarship (Kimball & Hawkins, 2008) on preferences about sans serif typefaces for titles.

Some participants highlighted that the red typeface on the first notice for “safety recall” competed for attention with the red underneath that listed the toy manufacturer’s name and the “choking hazard” warning. They preferred the second notice where the “choking hazard” words were large enough to gain attention. For instance, one participant said that because “‘choking hazard’ is in all caps and boldface, it helps

emphasize the reason for the recall.” Moreover, other participants suggested that instead of the notices using a generic “safety recall” expression across the top, they would like to see the hazard highlighted in big letters instead of putting it in a spot where it receives only secondary attention. Similar responses about highlighting the risk were offered with some of the toy safety recall notices in the risk communication section of the survey as well.

Another consistency in a majority of responses related to visual design was that the type size for the main description was too small for all notices in this section. One respondent stated about the description that “the information is in too small of a typefont. It does not convey the needed information quickly enough for a parent.” This observation would be especially true for store postings, where people pass through quickly.

Finally, another interesting point was that in the second series of recall notices pertaining to negative messages, some participants commented about the design of the notices. Multiple people pointed out that fewer words and larger type in the second notice in that series (Figure 5.5 for reference) enhanced the overall design. The interesting component of these responses was that the type size for the second notice was *exactly* the same size as the other two. However, the text on the notice created the illusion for consumers that the type size was actually larger. This example also emphasizes the visual design concept of white space. White space is important because it can define a document’s structure and offer methods for how to use the text (Schrivver,

1997). If a toy safety recall notice is overburdened with text, consumers may not be able to effectively navigate through the document, or worse, not take the time to read it.

Negative Messages

The negative message section presented some findings, which in some cases, support professional communication scholarship.

The first and third notices that participants viewed in this section were perceived to contain too much text and unnecessary explanation. Participants wanted a simpler approach from the text; they wanted to immediately know the hazard, the product, and what they should do. In the first notice, the first two sentences that describe the product and explain the noises the phone makes are a type of resale. For example, the text read, “The Little Tikes Chit ‘N Chat Toy Cell Phone resembles a flip-phone style cell phone and has a 10-key numeric button pad and three buttons with pictures of animals. All of the buttons make a sound when pressed.” Do consumers really need to know that the phone makes noises when the hazard concerns choking? Consumers did not respond favorably to this information. For instance, one participant stated, “the first paragraph has too much babble,” while another commented, “All of the buttons make a sound when pressed. What difference does that make?”

In fact, any sort of peripheral information such as a product description or an apology was seen as extraneous information. For example, one participant suggested that notices should be “concise enough to be read by consumers who are most likely

dragging around children and don't have time to read a book." Another stated that "as a mom, you do not have time to sit there and read everything with a screaming baby."

These findings indicate that toy safety recall notices should use a concise and direct approach when delivering negative news.

While the participants in my pilot study asked for more information about the faulty toys, the participants in this study wanted less. Interestingly, their perceptions conflict with Limaye's (1997, 2001) research that calls for more explanation in negative messages. As discussed in Chapter 2, he believes that it is ethical for a bad news provider to include as much explanation as possible. However, the participants in this study did not want an explanation; they wanted a document that would allow them to take action. Their perceptions align with the idea that the contexts and demands of a discourse community will shape the nature of a genre (Miller, 1984).

Although the survey did not explicitly ask participants about the use of buffers, two of the notices offer fascinating results. In the first toy safety recall notice in the negative message section, the text included a detailed product description, which is a type of neutral buffer, before it mentioned the potential choking danger. In the third notice, the text offered an apology, another type of buffer, before describing the risk. Many participants reacted negatively to both of these indirect approaches to the negative news. Specifically, one participant noted that there was "too much information provided. It is hard to determine the reason for the recall as it is embedded in so much text." Another stated of the first notice that "the first two sentences are irrelevant and detract from the message of the notice" On the other hand, a person stated the second

notice, which did not use a buffer “is direct without a lot of information to read through.”

This finding supports scholarship on negative messages (Locker, 1999; Locker & Kienzler, 2008), which argues that context should determine whether or not a buffer is used. Participants who envisioned themselves looking at these toy safety recall notices in a retail store wanted a direct approach for the negative news. Therefore, a notice with no buffer would probably be the most helpful. For instance, one participant stated that the direct approach of the second notice “cuts to the chase. I don’t have time to sort through the junk.” If consumers have screaming children in carts or are hurrying to purchase an item before picking up the kids from school or daycare, the available time they have to read a toy safety recall notice is limited. Therefore, to be effective, toy safety recall notices should probably use a direct approach to deliver the negative message.

Moreover, even though the corporate apology is a growing trend in business communication and some scholars argue it can help an organization save face (Patel & Reinsch, 2003), the participants in this study largely believed that a toy safety recall notice was no place to offer one. “Apologies sound too much like self promotion,” noted one participant, “and they can get the same message across just showing the concern for the child by a clear recall notice.” This quote captures the sentiments of many respondents who believed that the apology got in the way of clearly communicating the hazard associated with the toy.

Another interesting discovery was that, for many participants, the apology made the consumers more skeptical of the toy manufacturer and their business practices. One participant mentioned that “apologizing doesn’t cut it, especially when they repeat the apology. It makes it sound like they knew of the problem and put it [the toy phone] out there anyway.” So instead of the apology serving a traditional role—offering regret in an attempt to gain more ethos—the effect, in this particular instance, was the exact opposite.

Apologizing also aligns with the notion of taking responsibility. Gurau & Serban (2005) found in their study that organizations typically distance themselves from faulty products through language, such as using passive constructions. The manufacturers never take responsibility; instead, they shape the messages in ways so no one is to blame. For example, in first of the three notices in this section, the recall reads that “it has recently been discovered that the hinge cover on the toy cell phone can detach from the phone.” Here, no one is responsible for the hinge detaching. Will the child be the one to cause the potential danger or is the manufacturer responsible for an oversight?

For the third notice, I changed the passive voice, typically found in toy safety recall notices, to active, a positive politeness strategy according to Van Waes and Van Wijk (2001), outlined in Chapter 2. Kids Station became the agent of the action, the one responsible for the defect. Some participants noted they didn’t like this approach and instead preferred the notices where the danger was stated directly. Other participants also suggested that attributing Kids Station as the agent created a lack of urgency

compared to the other two notices. For example, one person wrote that “‘Kids Station would like to alert...’ Not forceful enough. No sense of urgency.”

Throughout my first observations of the data, I thought their comments were talking about passive voice. However, I have realized since then after rereading the comments that passive or active constructions were not the issue at all. Participants wanted direct notification of the risk associated with the toy. The language issues they had with the notices related to the hedging employed, which took emphasis off of and delayed the risk communication. For example, hedging is used when the notice states, “Kids station would like to alert consumers the phone contains a choking hazard” rather than stating directly and clearly, “choking hazard.” No hedging is a negative politeness strategy, and participants in my study preferred this approach. This result mimics Van Waes and Van Wijk’s (2001) findings in that their participants also favored negative politeness strategies in product recall messages.

Moreover, Beauvais (1998) asserts that one tactic of strategic containment happens when manufacturers omit information if it damages their reputation and by using “phrasing that obscures the manufacturer’s responsibility for the defect.” He believes that most readers won’t take the time to analyze a safety recall message to see the strategies that the manufacturers are employing. With the findings from my study, however, the participants did notice how the hedging interrupted a clear communication about risk.

Risk Communication

The interactive web that Grabill and Simmons (1998) call for, outlined in Chapter 2, is embodied to some extent in the way toy safety recall notices can be developed. Consumers have the ability to initiate a product recall by alerting the CPSC about the risks associated with a toy. Consumers can either fill in a form online or call a toll-free number. After the CPSC conducts an investigation, the process initiated by consumers could result in a product recall. Once a toy is recalled, the CPSC still keeps track of incidents—injuries, exposure, or death—that results from using the faulty toy and consumers can research that information online.

By taking initial steps, the consumer becomes part of a proactive interchange of information about risks associated with toys, similar to the one that Grabill and Simmons support. They argue that “users are intelligent and productive—like experts, users create knowledge—and sometimes user productivity takes decision making in new and important directions” (1998, p. 433). In other words, consumers of toys may experience issues with the product that was, perhaps, an oversight on the part of the toy design team. By experiencing and reporting these defects, consumers help create knowledge about the risks associated with a toy and instigate the risk communication process.

Participants in this toy safety recall study responded to the risks associated with the various toys based on their own contextual frameworks. As mentioned earlier, people responded to the lead risk with all levels of concern, from low to very high.

Perhaps part of this response could be explained because not everyone is aware of the danger that exists when children ingest lead. For example, one participant noted that, “it’s only lead, not a big deal.”

The larger part of the various responses depended on how people perceived risk, which supports understandings of risk perception (Kasperson & Kasperson, 2005). If, based on experience, audiences do not believe the risk is dangerous, they will act according to that mindset, regardless of how effectively a toy safety recall notice communicates risk. This perception of risk also aligns with the findings of Grabill and Simmons (1998), who suggests that “people’s risk perceptions are determined by real, localized situations” (p. 419). For example, some responded by saying their children were old or mature enough not to stick the toy in their mouths. One participant stated the “texture” of the toy was not one that the child would chew. As a result, these parents would not consider removing the toy.

Moreover, participants said they would take varied actions if they knew a child who owned a recalled toy. While individual respondents chose to act differently for each toy, as a whole, all of the participants could be lumped into a few categories: take the toy away, return the toy to the store, monitor the child when playing with the toy, destroy the toy, send for a replacement or repair piece, make the toy manufacturer aware of their anger, or do absolutely nothing. Interestingly, however, Kasperson, Golding, and Tuler (2005, p. 47) argue that “those most affected by the risk may be the least likely to participate in the process.” Even though participants might be affected by faulty toys, they still may not take part in the replacement process.

Once again, this range of responses indicates an important facet about risk—humans will act according to their perceptions of the risk and there is not one set path (Sjoberg, 2000). More specifically, some participants indicated their ability to monitor a child playing with toys or the child's age invalidates the risk. One respondent said that he/she would “probably leave the kid have it [wand] if they were past the age of putting it in their mouth.” Sjoberg would refer to this perception as “risk denial,” where consumers believe they have complete control over a risk. Some parents believe that when their child is playing with a toy, they will be able to monitor their child *at all times* so the risk does not affect them. However, the parents need to be preoccupied for only one second—phone ringing, someone at the door, etc.—when magnets could detach or the child chews on some lead paint laced toy. In other words, no matter how many precautions parents take, the risk associated with a faulty toy still exists.

Another important idea associated with risk is the motivation to act on the risk. This motivation is usually tied to the task the consumer needs to perform. With the Tinker Bell Wand, the consumer needed only to return the item to the nearest Disney store, which seemed, for many, like an easy task. However, some participants noted a reluctance to take action if the process for the repair or replacement wasn't easy. One participant mentioned about the Cinderella Ride-on Car that “I'm concerned that the consumer has to fix it with a kit instead of the manufacturer.” Consumers should feel this way since the car sold for \$200. Another respondent questioned, “how many parents will install a retrofit (or even know what the word means)?” The process of adding new technology to an older system for the Cinderella car may be difficult,

especially for unhandy parents. Another issue is the time to complete the task, which may not be available for single and/or working parents.

Participants also wanted an easy fix for the action figures. The process of calling the number, waiting for a prepaid mailer, sending back the toy, and then waiting again for a replacement toy seemed too involved for some. Consumers “should not have to mail in rejected toys; should be easier to get the replacement,” stated a participant. From an economic standpoint, the fewer toys that are returned, the better the bottom line for the toy manufacturer.

Consumers also seemed to appreciate when toy safety recall notices spelled out the seriousness of risks for the child. For instance, even though the lead from the Tinker Bell Wand, depending on the concentration, and the fire from the Cinderella Ride-on Car both have the potential to cause death, consumers appeared to be more appreciative of the magnetic action figure toy safety recall notice, which specifically indicated that a child could die. One participant stated “the danger level is very explicit.” However, Mega Brands may have needed to include the fatality warning because some consumers were not aware of the unique risk from the specific type of magnets used. Powell (1996) asserts that “risk communication can be successful only to the extent that it raises the level of understanding of relevant issues or actions, and satisfies those involved that they are adequately informed within the limits of available knowledge.” In other words, if audiences do not understand what’s at stake with a dangerous toy, they may not be able to make the best decision based on the risk.

The participants who favored the magnetic action figure recall most likely would agree with Johnson-Sheehan's (2010) suggestion that safety information should include the hazard, its seriousness, and what to do to avoid the hazard. The MangaMan recall exemplifies this strategy by describing the hazard (choking/intestinal blockage, perforation), the seriousness (possible fatality), and the action consumers should take (remove the toy immediately). If all toy safety recall notices followed this procedure for communicating risk, perhaps they would be more effective.

Some participants were obviously outraged over lead paint. Most of them cited how laws prohibit lead in house paint, yet toys for innocent children still contain lead paint. For example, one participant wrote, "I'm disgusted that another toy has lead paint." Another responder noted that "it is upsetting to know that I may have exposed my children to lead paint by giving them a toy." Clearly, the concerns of participants raise the larger contextual questions: Why are there not better regulations on the toys in our country? After the first incident of lead paint in a toy, why wasn't the situation immediately resolved for all other toys?

Some of the participants also discussed that they would appreciate warning symbols or icons on the toy safety recall notices, which would quickly help them to visually determine the hazard. For instance, they offered that maybe a symbol of a child choking or a symbol with flames could be used. Perhaps some scale or risk level would help not only the participants in my study but all parents. Unfortunately, as Gurau and Serban (2005) discovered, product recall messages rarely adapt to the degree of danger.

One exception, thanks to the 1994 Child Safety Protection Act, is that a choking hazard warning must appear on all toys that contain small parts intended for children three years or younger (“Choosing,” 2007). The choking hazard symbol, shown in Figure 5.10, contains the International Organization

for Standardization’s warning symbol with the “choking hazard” written below. However, this modification of the ISO warning symbol does not visually convey choking. Moreover, there are no



Figure 5.10: Example of choking hazard label that appears on toys

universal symbols or icons that represent lead ingestion or magnet swallowing. Perhaps a recommendation to the CPSC would be to develop a series of symbols for the most commonly recalled hazards—choking, lead, magnet aspiration/perforation, burns, fire—that could appear on all toy safety recall notices. On the other hand, a universal approach for communication would be in direct opposition to what some scholars (Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 2005; Powell, 1996) suggest is key for effective risk communication; directly tailoring the message to the target audience.

Throughout this discussion, I have shown how the three areas of scholarship—visual design, negative messages, and risk communication—relate to toy safety recall notices and provide a foundation for understanding the genre. Moreover, this discussion also helped to prove how difficult it is to artificially separate the three areas when examining the toy safety recall notice genre.

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CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter outlines the conclusions that I've drawn on how toy safety recall notices could be more effective, the limitations of my study, and suggestions for more research.

Conclusions

The survey and rhetorical analysis of toy safety recall notices allows me to draw some fascinating conclusions about toy safety recall notices. However, as I mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, since this is a case study, all findings are limited to the particular contexts associated with the case. In addition, the statistical information does not serve as a viable random sample of how American citizens as a whole may react to toy safety recall notices.

One major finding is that the areas under investigation—visual design, negative messages, and risk communication—are inextricably linked within the genre of toy safety recall notices. Many times throughout the survey, participants had difficulty answering questions about just one of the designated areas. Although my Venn diagram from Chapter 2 shows some overlap, perhaps circles should be much closer to one another.

I have broken the rest of this discussion into two major areas: rhetorical situation issues and construction considerations.

Rhetorical Situation Issues

Overall, many of my conclusions relate to the rhetorical situation of toy safety recall notices.

One major issue that repeatedly surfaced in the risk communication discussion is that people respond to risk situations depending upon their perception of the risk and other contextual factors, such as a child's age or behavior, that help shape this perception. The replies of what the audience would do with each faulty toy offered a variety of responses, which supports this notion about individualized risk perception. The audience was answering the questions based on their own conceptual framework, and so there usually was not a clear consensus when dealing with issues of risk.

In addition, consumers seem to be more inclined and motivated to act on a risk if the method to resolve the situation is communicated clearly and appears easy. Returning a toy to the retail store appears to be the easiest solution. Sending in mailer or performing a retrofit are not viewed favorably by audiences. However, I wonder if there was some extra, perhaps monetary, incentive attached to the fix or replacement if parents would be more likely and willing to resolve the situation.

While consumers are already involved in the amplification of risk, as described in earlier chapters, they should also take an active role in determining risks of faulty toys by

alerting the CPSC. Moreover, if possible, consumers should also have a participatory role during the creation of toy safety recalls notices. Perhaps drafts of toy safety recall notices could gather audience comments for at least a few days before they are distributed nationally.

In terms of purposes of toy safety recall notices, the audience beliefs are almost evenly divided between protecting children and reducing litigation for the toy manufacturer. However, the purposes from the perspective of toy manufacturers may be completely different. Although not investigated in this study, the toy manufacturers may be trying to reduce litigation while at the same time purposely creating poor toy safety recall notices so that fewer consumers return their products. From an economic view, the fewer toys returned, the better the bottom line.

Finally, with regard to physical contexts for toy safety recall notices in retail stores, there doesn't seem to be an ideal location. As a result, the largest number of people would encounter the notices if they are posted in a multiple and highly visible locations—customer service, checkout counters, toy aisle, layaway department, etc.—in every store. In addition, a newer approach may be to set up a recall booth or a similar display station at every store entrance that sells faulty toys.

Construction Considerations

Overall, throughout the survey and rhetorical analysis, many issues surfaced from this study that that would be useful to consider when creating toy safety recall notices.

Toy safety recall notices should *always* contain large clear visuals of the product being recalled. These visuals draw consumers' attention and help them quickly evaluate whether they own the affected toy before reading any of the text on the notice. In addition, the visuals should show the product rather than the packaging because most consumers dispose of the packaging when the toy enters their house. Visuals should also help consumers locate the portion of the toy that poses a risk to the child by using arrows or other appropriate call-outs.

Moreover, toy safety recall notices should continue to use bright red titles because of the clearly visible high figure-ground contrast and our cultural color association of danger with red. However, instead of the titles stating "safety recall," the notices could use the hazard as the title (e.g., "Choking Hazard" or "Lead Hazard"). These alternative titles may save consumers' time by not having to search for the risk associated with the toy. Too often the risk is buried in a paragraph of text.

Type size of all body text should be as large as possible. Since the notices enact a poster-like role, consumers need to be able to read the sign without holding it in their hand. Moreover, the audiences for the notices vary greatly, so some may have poor eyesight, which would make reading tiny text difficult and increase the risk factor if they owned the toy.

At the same time, the notices should have sufficient white space. One way to achieve this white space is to minimize the text on toy safety recall notices. The text should identify the product and hazard, clearly outline the seriousness of the risk, and clearly direct a consumer to take the necessary action with a defective toy.

To help with the identification of the risk, the CPSC, or another consumer advocacy group, might consider developing a series of symbols for the most commonly recalled toy hazards—choking, lead ingestion, magnet aspiration/perforation, burns. These symbols could appear on all toy safety recall notices to offer consumers an easy visual identification cue about the hazard.

In the construction of the text that appears on the notices, apologies should be avoided. Apologies from toy manufacturers are viewed negatively in this study, often leading consumers to be skeptical of their intentions. Any extraneous information should also be omitted from the toy safety recall notices. For instance they should avoid providing a product description or resale information, which are also viewed negatively by audiences. Toy safety recall notices should employ a direct approach to negative news.

Finally, negative politeness strategies seem to be the preferred style of language for negative news. When information is stated with hedging, for example, consumers feel the messages lack a sense of urgency. Another way to increase urgency and action by audiences of the toy safety recall notices is to use the imperative mood.

Limitations

As stated earlier, one of the largest limitations to my study is that the findings are limited to the elements involved in this particular case study. Specifically, because I did

not have a random sample, I cannot make wider claims that the participants in my study perceived toy safety recall notices in ways that would be representative of a wider population.

The total number of people who took the survey was lower than I anticipated. I assumed that posting the survey to the parenting and child safety forums would generate interest and soliciting participants would not be difficult. Unfortunately, the nature of the websites worked against me. On the days I posted (or reposted) the survey link in a forum thread, a significant number of people took the survey. However, as a day or two passed and my forum post moved further down the browser window, fewer people participated. Additional or alternative approaches could have been used for the dissemination of the survey, perhaps by working through the CPSC.

Another limitation is that the survey was too long. As a result, a significant percentage of people who started Part I did not continue on to Part II. Even for those participants who did continue onto Part II, some decided to stop answering the questions, while others chose to answer only “quick” questions as opposed to questions that asked them to type a response. Fewer open-ended type questions probably would have helped completion rates. The survey took longer to complete than I had anticipated, especially Part II. The amount of time it took probably also contributed to the lower than anticipated response rate.

Probably the largest limitation for me personally, as someone who values qualitative research, is that I did not have direct contact with participants. When I first proposed this study, my intention was to conduct interviews with people I solicited

through the survey. However, when I was denied access to school districts and had to move online, the ability to interview became unattainable.

I believe that some of my findings would be perhaps altered or expanded if I had the opportunity to talk with participants and ask follow-up questions, particularly as they responded to the modifications of toy safety recall notices from Part II. For example, risk communication and perceptions about risk are somewhat amorphous topics. While I tried to create survey questions that would give me a sense of how people react to risks associated with recalled toys, I believe that talking to people face-to-face about what they would do in the case of a recalled toy and *why* they would act that way would have provided better results. Participants would have also offered more in-depth perceptions and reactions if they were not bound by having to physically type their responses. In an effort to increase face-to-face time, future studies should try to solicit audiences by targeting daycare centers, church groups, or family centers.

While creating the survey, I also focused on too many intra-level design issues of type in the three modified toy safety recall notices in the visual design section. My modifications mainly focused on type style, size, and justification issues. However, the responses indicate that most people were not in tune to these, perhaps, minute alterations. For example, no one stated anything related to the clarity of different styles of titles. In future surveys, there should be more directed questions about title typeface preferences, which could resolve this issue and help to determine if they impact how audiences read the notices. Participants focused much more on the larger design issues when answering questions about visual design.

I have found only one toy safety recall notice that breaks the traditional appearance of toy safety recall notices (see Figure 6.1 below). Unfortunately, I discovered this notice only after the design modifications for my survey images were created and active online. I wish that I had created toy safety recall notices with more visual variety for my participants to respond to.

The Nerf Blaster recall has some excellent visual elements. The bright red



Figure 6.1: Toy safety recall notice that breaks traditional design approaches

background immediately demands a lot of attention, as does the red title. The large picture of the toy greatly assists consumers with deciding if they own the product. In addition, the notice also does a great job of numerically highlighting the steps a consumer needs to take—remove, then contact. But the notice could do a better job describing the hazard.

For instance, “injury to the face, neck or chest” is kind of vague. A more clearly defined hazard may also function better as the document’s title. Moreover, while there is a picture of the toy with a red arrow and circle, the hazard caused by this part of the toy is unclear, especially when paired with the text below it. Nonetheless, the overall point here is that I wish I had experimented more with visual design in my survey. Instead, the toy safety recall notices too closely mimicked the style that already exists.

Future Areas for Research

This section outlines various future areas for research on toy safety recall notices. Probably the most obvious suggestion would be to design a new statistical survey that includes a random sample to make larger conclusions about the American public and their beliefs of toy safety recall notices. The survey could extend the tests of visual design, negative messages, and risk communication.

Another future avenue is to examine other actors in the recall process. For example, an ethnographic investigation might involve multiple retail stores to understand their process of dealing with toy safety recall notices. Specifically, when they receive notice from a toy manufacturer, what are their first moves? How are placement decisions made? Who decides them? To what extent do retail stores make an effort to alert consumers?

A different ethnographic study of toy manufacturers could follow the document production and cycling process. Who are the people at the toy manufacturers that actually construct these notices? Do these persons have degrees or knowledge about public and/or risk communication? What background do they have in visual design? What purposes do they see for the notices? Are they to save lives or to protect their own interests? What legal constraints are in place during the creation of these notices?

Another study could investigate the CPSC. While the CPSC lists the number of injuries/incidents associated with each toy, how accurate are these numbers? Are all toy related injuries reported to this organization? What would be a better method for creating a database about incidents with toys? In addition, now that the Consumer Product Safety Information Act of 2008 has officially commenced, a study could investigate what impact the law is having on manufacturers, suppliers, and retail stores including large chain and second-hand stores. All of these groups are now accountable and can be penalized up to \$100,000 for violations. What violations have been enforced? Who has received them? For what reasons? How was the law, specifically the extra funding, impacted the CPSC as the enforcing agency on faulty products?

Other studies could examine the recall process. While my study investigates audience perceptions of toy safety recall notices, another possible study from these findings could be the need to scrutinize the recall process of consumers. How easy do toy manufacturers make the process for consumers to receive a replacement toy or reimbursement? How could the process be streamlined to be even more effective? To what extent does the recall process motivate people to take action on a faulty toy?

The dissemination of the toy safety recall notices could also be study. For instance, what are the best ways to disseminate toy safety recall information? How much more effective is the internet compared to paper notices for distributing toy recall information to consumers?

A final study could investigate globalization. Specifically, a study could investigate the complex supply chains of products produced in other countries but sold by American companies. What check and balances are in place to ensure quality products and fair labor conditions? To what extent are toy companies motivated to produce their goods abroad?

Works Cited

Hasbro Toy Group. (2008). Urgent safety recall: Nerf n-strike recon cs-6 blaster. *Toys R Us*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <http://www4.toysrus.com/safety/669418.cfm>

APPENDIX A: SURVEY LETTER

Appendix A displays the letter that participants read before they started the survey.

WELCOME

You have the opportunity to make toy safety recall notices more effective. In 2007, approximately 80 toys affecting millions of families were recalled by the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC). You probably remember the excessive amount of toys using lead paint or the Aqua Dots that contained the date rape drug. So far in 2008, there have been 65 recalled toys, and this number is only likely to grow as we move into the holiday season.

I am a graduate student at Iowa State University currently conducting research that investigates the effectiveness of these toy safety recall notices. With the results of my study, I hope to eventually help make the communications to the public about recalled toys more effective.

To improve this research, I ask you to fill out the following survey. You are being invited to participate in this study because you have a connection to a child who is 12 years of age or younger. Your feedback will provide useful information to help make toy safety recall notices more effective, which in turn could save the lives of children.

The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes of your time, and your participation is, of course, completely voluntary. You may choose to skip questions or leave the survey at any time. Your name or contact information will not be recorded. This survey is in compliance with my university's institutional research board.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my supervising professor at the information listed below.

Thanks,

Christopher Toth
tothc28@iastate.edu
515-460-5461

Donna Kienzler, Supervisor
dkienzle@iastate.edu
515-294-4065

APPENDIX B: SURVEY

This survey has been modified from its original web format to fit the requirements of this document

Please choose the answer that best reflects your views.

1. Have you ever seen a toy safety recall notice (example is pictured to the right)?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) I don't remember

2. How did you come in contact with toy safety recall notices?

- A) Newspaper
- B) Television
- C) Internet
- D) Retail store
- E) Other_____ (please specify)

3. How often do you check for new toy safety recall notices?

- A) Daily
- B) Weekly
- C) Monthly
- D) Yearly
- E) Never
- E) Other_____ (please specify)



4. **How many children's toys that you have purchased or received have been recalled?**
- A) None
 - B) 1-2
 - C) 3-4
 - D) 5-6
 - E) I don't know
 - F) Other_____ (please specify)
5. **How many children's toys have you removed, returned, or destroyed based on recall notices?**
- A) None
 - B) 1-2
 - C) 3-4
 - D) 5-6
 - E) Other_____ (please specify)
6. **If a child you know had a toy that was recalled, what would you MOST likely do?**
- A) Keep toy
 - B) Destroy toy
 - C) Take toy away
 - D) Return toy
 - E) Other_____ (please specify)
7. **If a child you know had a toy that was recalled, what would you be LEAST likely to do?**
- A) Keep toy
 - B) Destroy toy
 - C) Take toy away
 - D) Return toy
 - E) Other (please specify)
8. **What do you believe is the primary purpose of a toy safety recall notice?**
- A) To promote the manufacturer
 - B) To protect children
 - C) To reduce legal action
 - D) To remove item from store shelf
 - E) Other_____ (please specify)

9. What do you believe are secondary purposes of toy safety recall notices?

(Check all that apply)

- A) To promote toy manufacturer
- B) To protect children
- C) To reduce legal action
- D) To remove item from store shelf
- E) Other (please specify)

10. If a child you know had a toy that was recalled, what factor would MOST likely prompt you to RETURN the toy?

- A) Price
- B) Hazard associated with toy
- C) Child's liking for toy
- D) Child's age
- E) Other (please specify)

11. If a child you know had a toy that was recalled, what factor would MOST likely prompt you to KEEP the toy?

- A) Price
- B) Hazard associated with toy
- C) Child's liking for toy
- D) Child's age
- E) Other (please specify)

Please answer each of the following open-ended questions.

12. Where would be the best location for you to view safety recall notices in retail stores and why?

13. If you had a toy recall experience, what was your experience with the recall process? (press next if not applicable)

Congratulations! You have finished Part I of this survey. Thank you for your responses.

If you would be willing to assist even more with this research by participating in a feedback session, please click "Yes, continue to Part II." In Part II, you will be shown a variety of toy safety recall notices and be asked to contribute your perceptions about their effectiveness.

If you are not interested, please click "No, thanks" and answer a final page of questions.

A) Yes, continue to Part II

B) No, thanks

Thank you for continuing with this survey. Your input is greatly appreciated!

Throughout this part of the survey, you will view toy safety recall notices and be asked to provide your perceptions/beliefs about the notices. First you will be asked questions about the **TEXT** used on the notices, then the **DESIGN** of the notices, and finally the **RISKS** associated with the recall notices.

In the following pages, you will view three versions of a safety recall notice for the same toy with variations in the **TEXT**. Please answer the questions primarily about the **TEXT** inside the blue brackets on each recall notice.

Safety Recall Notice #1a

1. How effective is

- A) this safety recall notice?
 Very Effective
 Somewhat Effective
 Somewhat Ineffective
 Very Ineffective

- B) the WORDING in this safety recall

notice?

- Very Effective
 Somewhat Effective
 Somewhat Ineffective
 Very Ineffective

2. What phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are effective? Why?

3. Which phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are ineffective? Why?



Safety Recall Notice #1b

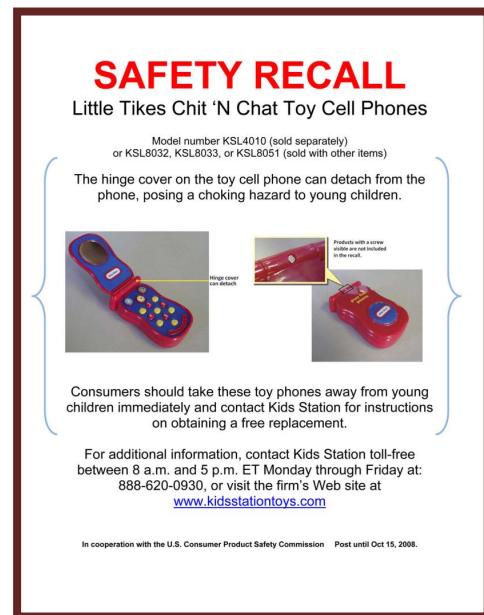
1. How effective is

A) this safety recall notice?

- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Somewhat Ineffective
- Very Ineffective

B) the WORDING in this safety recall notice?

- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Somewhat Ineffective
- Very Ineffective



2. What phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are effective?

Why?

3. Which phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are ineffective? Why?

Safety Recall Notice #1c

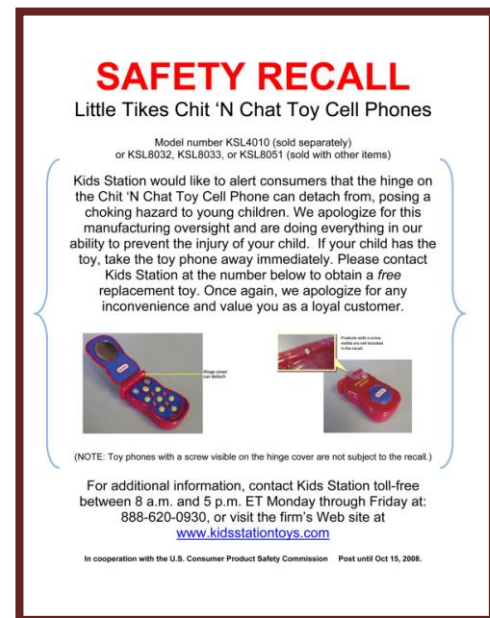
1. How effective is

A) this safety recall notice?

Very Effective
Somewhat Effective
Somewhat Ineffective
Very Ineffective

B) the WORDING in this safety recall notice?

Very Effective
Somewhat Effective
Somewhat Ineffective
Very Ineffective



2. What phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are effective?

Why?

3. Which phrases/sentences, if any, in the blue brackets do you believe are ineffective? Why?

Safety Recall #1a,b,c

A

B

C

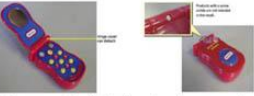
SAFETY RECALL

Little Tikes Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phones

Model number KSL4010 (sold separately)
or KSL8032, KSL8033, or KSL8051 (sold with other items)

The Little Tikes Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phone resembles a flip-phone style cell phone and has a 10-key numeric button pad and three buttons with pictures of animals. All of the buttons make a sound when pressed. It has recently been discovered that the hinge cover on the toy cell phone can detach from the phone, posing a choking hazard to young children.

(Toy phones with a screw visible on the hinge cover are not subject to the recall.)



Consumers should take these toy phones away from young children immediately and contact Kids Station to obtain a free replacement.

For additional information, contact Kids Station toll-free between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. ET Monday through Friday at: 888-620-0930, or visit the firm's Web site at www.kidsstationtoys.com

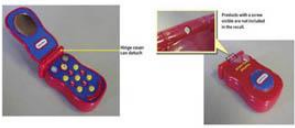
In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Post until Oct 15, 2008.

SAFETY RECALL

Little Tikes Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phones

Model number KSL4010 (sold separately)
or KSL8032, KSL8033, or KSL8051 (sold with other items)

The hinge cover on the toy cell phone can detach from the phone, posing a choking hazard to young children.



Consumers should take these toy phones away from young children immediately and contact Kids Station for instructions on obtaining a free replacement.

For additional information, contact Kids Station toll-free between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. ET Monday through Friday at: 888-620-0930, or visit the firm's Web site at www.kidsstationtoys.com


In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Post until Oct 15, 2008.

SAFETY RECALL

Little Tikes Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phones

Model number KSL4010 (sold separately)
or KSL8032, KSL8033, or KSL8051 (sold with other items)

Kids Station would like to alert consumers that the hinge on the Chit 'N Chat Toy Cell Phone can detach from the phone, posing a choking hazard to young children. We apologize for this manufacturing oversight and are doing everything in our ability to prevent the injury of your child. If your child has the toy, take the toy phone away immediately. Please contact Kids Station at the number below to obtain a free replacement toy. Once again, we apologize for any inconvenience and value you as a loyal customer.



(NOTE: Toy phones with a screw visible on the hinge cover are not subject to the recall.)

For additional information, contact Kids Station toll-free between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. ET Monday through Friday at: 888-620-0930, or visit the firm's Web site at www.kidsstationtoys.com

In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Post until Oct 15, 2008.

1. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **MOST** effective? Why?

2. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **LEAST** effective? Why?

3. If you knew a child who owned this specific toy, what would you do based on your reading of this safety recall notice?

In the following pages, you will view three versions of a safety recall notice for the same toy with variations in the **DESIGN** of the notice. Please answer the questions primarily about the **DESIGN** on each recall notice.

Safety Recall Notice #2a

1. What area of the toy safety recall notice do you look at first? Why?

2. How effective is

A) this safety recall notice?

- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Somewhat Ineffective
- Very Ineffective

B) the **DESIGN** of this safety recall notice?

- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Somewhat Ineffective
- Very Ineffective

3. Which parts, if any, of this safety recall notice's **DESIGN** do you believe are effective? Why?

4. Which parts, if any, of the safety recall notice's **DESIGN** do you believe are ineffective? Why?



Safety Recall Notice #2b

1. What area of the toy safety recall notice do you look at first? Why?

2. How effective is

A) this safety recall notice?

Very Effective

Somewhat Effective

Somewhat Ineffective

Very Ineffective

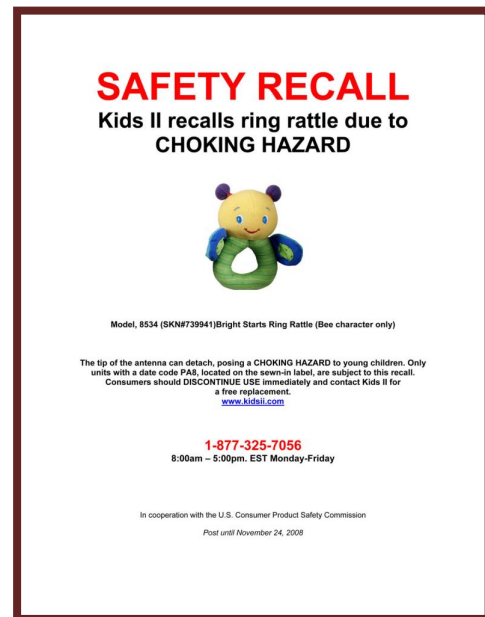
B) the DESIGN of this safety recall notice?

Very Effective

Somewhat Effective

Somewhat Ineffective

Very Ineffective



3. Which parts, if any, of this safety recall notice's DESIGN do you believe are effective? Why?

4. Which parts, if any, of the safety recall notice's DESIGN do you believe are ineffective? Why?

Safety Recall Notice #2c

1. What area of the toy safety recall notice do you look at first? Why?

2. How effective is

A) this safety recall notice?

Very Effective

Somewhat Effective

Somewhat Ineffective

Very Ineffective

B) the DESIGN of this safety recall notice?

Very Effective

Somewhat Effective

Somewhat Ineffective

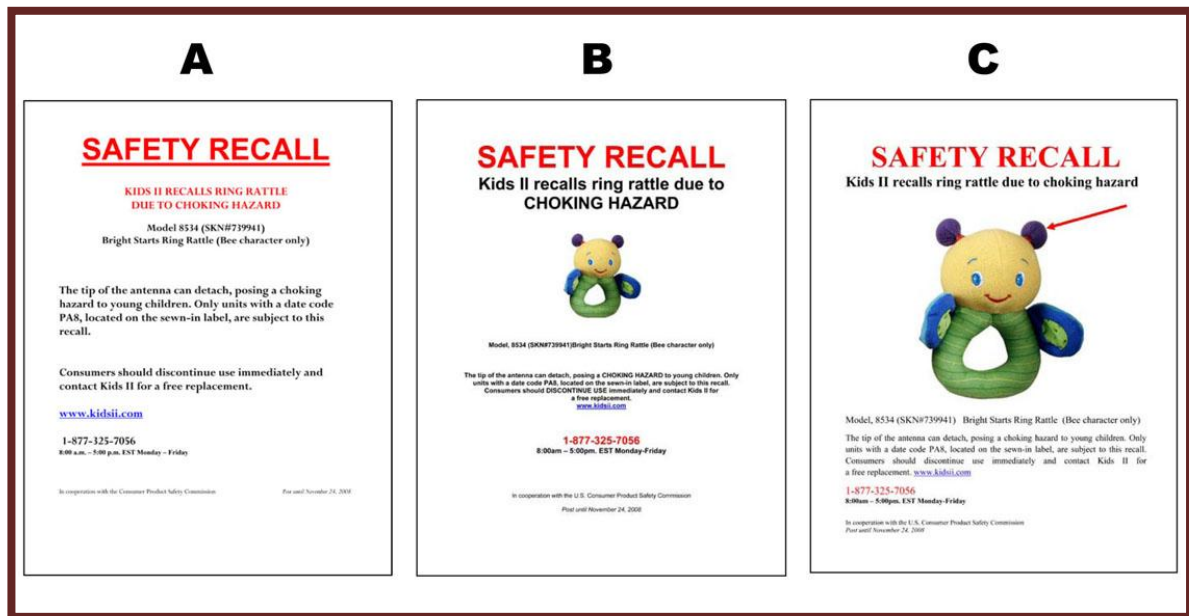
Very Ineffective

3. Which parts, if any, of this safety recall notice's DESIGN do you believe are effective? Why?

4. Which parts, if any, of the safety recall notice's DESIGN do you believe are ineffective? Why?



Safety Recall #2a,b,c



1. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **MOST** effective? Why?

2. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **LEAST** effective? Why?

3. If you knew a child who owned this specific toy, what would you do based on your reading of this safety recall notice?

In the final pages, you will view three versions of a toy safety recall notice for different RISKS. Please answer the questions primarily about the RISKS associated with each toy.

Safety Recall Notice #3a

1) What is your first reaction after reading this safety recall notice?

2) What risk does the safety recall notice convey to you?

3) How effective is this safety recall message at alerting you to a risk associated with the toy?

- A) Very Effective
- B) Somewhat Effective
- C) Somewhat Ineffective
- D) Very Ineffective

4) What do you think is the purpose of this toy safety recall notice?

5) If you knew a child who owned this toy, what would you do?

6) Do you have any suggestions on how the risk associated with this toy could be better communicated?



Safety Recall Notice #3b

1) What is your first reaction after reading this safety recall notice?

2) What risk does the safety recall notice convey to you?

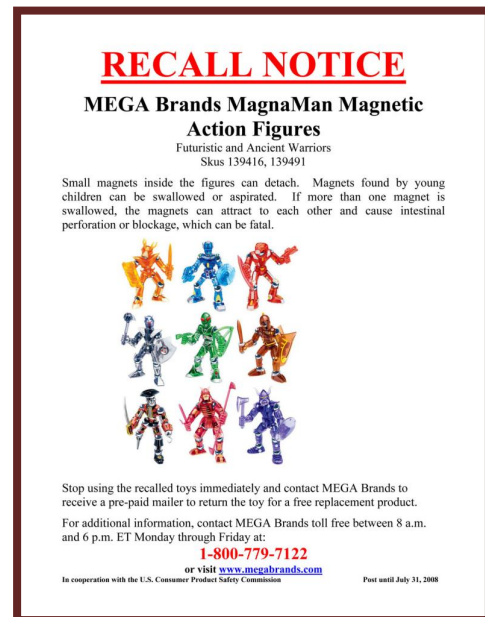
3) How effective is this safety recall message at alerting you to a risk associated with the toy?

- A) Very Effective
- B) Somewhat Effective
- C) Somewhat Ineffective
- D) Very Ineffective

4) What do you think is the purpose of this toy safety recall notice?

5) If you knew a child who owned this toy, what would you do?

6) Do you have any suggestions on how the risk associated with this toy could be better communicated?



Safety Recall Notice #3c

1) What is your first reaction after reading this safety recall notice?

2) What risk does the safety recall notice convey to you?

3) How effective is this safety recall message at alerting you to a risk associated with the toy?

- A) Very Effective
- B) Somewhat Effective
- C) Somewhat Ineffective
- D) Very Ineffective

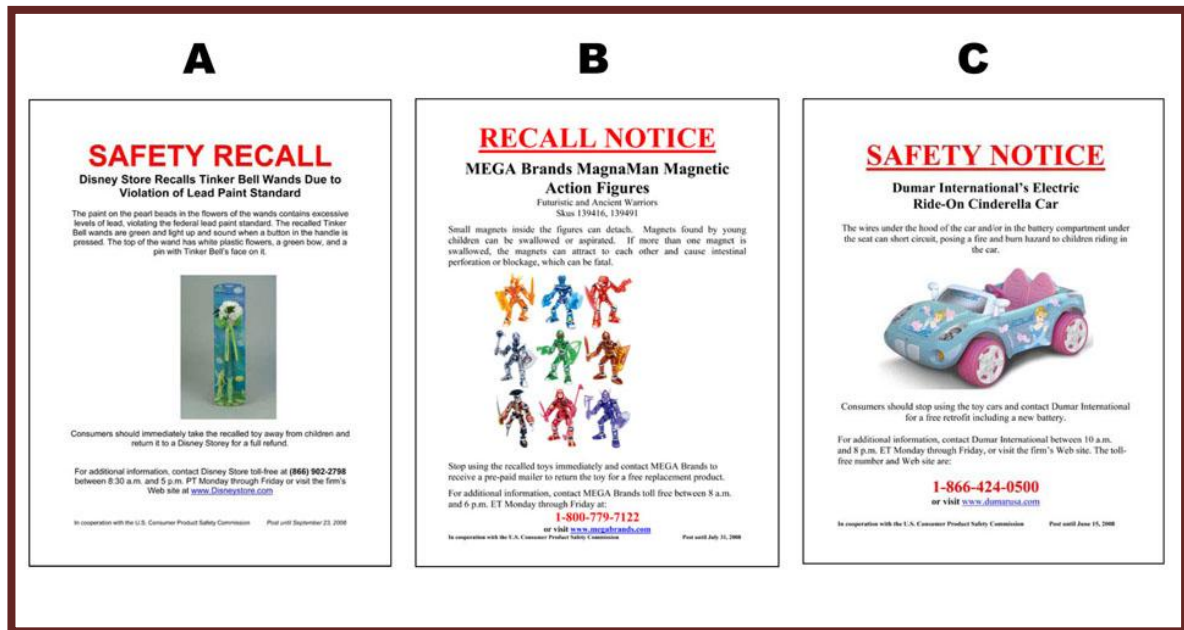
4) What do you think is the purpose of this toy safety recall notice?

5) If you knew a child who owned this toy, what would you do?

6) Do you have any suggestions on how the risk associated with this toy could be better communicated?



Safety Recall #3a,b,c



1. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **MOST** effective? Why?

2. Out of the three toy safety recall notices you just viewed (pictured above), which do you believe (A, B, or C) is the **LEAST** effective? Why?

Demographic Questions**1) Are you**

- A) Male
- B) Female

2) What is your age?

- A) 0-20 years old
- B) 21-40 years old
- C) 41-80 years old
- D) 81 and over

3) How many children do you purchase toys for?**4) What are the ages of the children for which you purchase toys? (Check all that apply)**

- A) Infant
- B) 2-3 years old
- C) 4-5 years old
- D) 6-8 years old
- E) 9-12 years old

5) What is the relationship to the children for whom you purchase toys?

- A) Parent/Step-Parent
- B) Guardian/Foster-Parent
- C) Grandparent
- D) Aunt/Uncle
- E) Sister/Brother
- F) Friend
- G) Other (please specify)

6) What is your household income?

- A) \$0-\$40k
- B) \$41-\$80k
- C) \$81-\$120k
- D) Over \$121k

THANK YOU!!!

Your answers are greatly appreciated in helping to understand how toy safety recall notices can be more effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to those who helped me with various aspects of this research project, especially everyone who volunteered to complete the survey. Without their help, I would have no results. In addition, I also would like to thank those who indirectly helped me finish this dissertation and graduate degree. Unfortunately, there are too many of you to mention by name in these short acknowledgements.

I would also like to directly thank my committee members for their efforts and contributions to this project: Barbara Blakely, Margaret Graham, Debra Marquart, and Susan Cross. I would additionally like to thank Barb for her encouragement during the initial stages of my pilot study in her methodology course.

Finally, I would like thank Donna Kienzler for her guidance, patience, and support throughout the research and the writing of this dissertation. Donna's insights and directed advice have been extremely helpful for the completion of this project. I'm positive I would have not finished without our weekly meetings in Morrill Hall. I deeply appreciate the fact that these meetings were scheduled for one hour but usually lasted at least one and a half (at a minimum)! I will definitely miss these meetings and the time we spent together. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!